

POPULATION DECLINE AND CONTEMPORARY DURKHEIMIAN THEORY*

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ABSTRACT

Of the "classic" sociological theorists, it was Durkheim who established as a central concern the challenge of moral development in the face of rapid modernization. In traditional societies, characterized by mechanical solidarity, Durkheim saw religion constructing the basis for collective representations. The moral dimension of traditional societies was centralized and enforced with repressive laws. With the transition to organic solidarity, as a result of Durkheim's largely unstated assumption of the changes brought on by population growth—which he equated with 'moral density'—the centrality of religious beliefs declined. From religion to law to social contracts, the foundations on which societies rest shifted dramatically. In postmodern societies, with declining populations and rapidly-evolving technological capabilities, the relationship between moral development and the basis for organic solidarity becomes less clear. Population growth and an increasing division of labor no longer foster the type of social integration and moral density that Durkheim posited. The shifting modalities of moral development that are emerging in postmodern societies were, however, anticipated by Durkheimian theory, and out of this several propositions for further investigation are outlined.

'Things fall apart; the center cannot hold' —
Yeats

DURKHEIM'S LEGACY

Beyond the honorific of being designated as one of the "masters" of sociological thought,¹ Emile Durkheim has also become, in Foucault's words, a "founder of discourse."² Of the great ideas in classical sociological theory, Durkheim's formulations stand alone in several respects. It was the intellectual trajectory of Durkheim's 'positivistic organicism'³ that allowed him to develop entirely new conceptual approaches for understanding the modern social world. For example, despite the incorporation of data into their analyses, Marx and Weber accomplished this only sporadically in their writings and data were largely treated as anecdotal support for theoretical conclusions reached in advance. Durkheim's positivistic organicism—reflected, for example, in his masterful analysis in *Suicide*—constituted a revolutionary shift in social thought and sociological method. Van Poppel and Day have asserted that

...the analytical rigor and theoretical underpinning of *Suicide* have made it the most influential of works. It is the customary starting point for both the sociological and the epistemological analysis of suicide. (1996 501)

Cuzzort has remarked that:

Durkheim's influence on the methods of modern social science was extensive. He moved social philosophy in the direction of a concern with facts. (1989 28)

Alexander has raised the estimation of Durkheim's contribution yet higher:

...the modern theory of social change as differentiation begins with Durkheim. (Alexander 1986 3)

With these distinctive accomplishments, the question must then be asked why Durkheim has been praised so highly, often above the other "masters," yet the implications of his substantive thought have yet to be fully explored and extended. When the sociological problem to be addressed is one of moral development, many of Durkheim's ideas retain their capacity to inform contemporary sociological investigations and to provide a unique modernist perspective on contemporary moral development in society. Emirbayer has recently remarked that:

[Durkheim's] writings all take on the task of thinking through the significance for modern social life of the moral integration and regulation of the individual and of the deleterious impact, in particular, of modern tendencies towards egoism and anomie. (2003 52)

However, much of the discourse surround-

ing Durkheim has been limited to descriptive narrative, from the outset of the wider reception of his works (cf. Merton 1934). In point of fact, Durkheim's own ideas seem to be increasingly buried under increasing layers of secondary interpretive literature, however well intended these efforts may have been. In her masterful translator's introduction to *The Elementary Forms*, Karen E. Fields remarks that

...*Formes* is widely mentioned and characterized, if not so widely read. Like broccoli, classics are said to be good for one, even if swallowed unwillingly. (1995 xxii-xxiii)

The result is that some rather less than satisfying portions of Durkheim have been served up, thus lacking the elegance of his reasoning and the potential of his ideas to inform subsequent efforts.

There have been notable exceptions: Swanson's (1960) *The Birth of the Gods* leads the list of seminal post-Durkheimian investigations. Shils and Young's (1956) exposition of charisma, sacred meaning, and ritual (see their article "The Meaning of the Coronation")

redeemed Durkheim's claim that a theory developed in relation to Aboriginal totemism was still relevant. (Smith & Alexander 1996 588)

Additionally, several efforts have been made by those following a theory constructionist approach (e.g., Gibbs 2003), who have attempted to refine Durkheim's concepts by developing out of his division of labor thesis a series of empirically testable propositions. Van Poppel and Day (1996), utilizing historical documents, and following earlier critics of Durkheim's methodological approach (e.g., Pope 1976; Pope & Danigelis 1981; Stark, Doyle, & Rushing 1983; Day 1987), found little evidence for Durkheim's thesis regarding the societally-engendered sources of suicide. Similarly, an extensive content analysis of wills and beneficiaries found little evidence for a shift from purely familial to organizational ties as Durkheim posited (Schwartz 1996). Again, however, Fields' cautionary note is in effect: It is not necessarily the answers obtained by a great classic mind, but the questions generated that retain their relevance. Increasingly, it appears that quite inno-

vative interpretations of current developments in society have been made by utilizing a Durkheimian framework. Recently, TenHouton's (1995) reexamination of Durkheim's explication of interaction rituals in *Elementary Forms* produced a new conceptual framework for a structural analysis of primary emotions. Similarly, Alexander (1988) provided a penetrating illustration of the power of Durkheimian thought with his depiction of the American collective conscience and the reaction to moral transgression, symbolic transformation, and political crisis through his analysis of the Watergate scandal. The fact remains, however, that the vast majority of writings have unfortunately been *about* Durkheim and his thought, rather than attempting to apply his often seminal ideas.⁴

MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE COMING OF THE MODERN WORLD

However his works have been treated, the inescapable fact remains that Durkheim's conceptual approach to sociological questions—with the *Leitmotiv* being the existence of the social fact—was revolutionary and remains a driving force that distinguishes sociology from other disciplines. These social facts, for Durkheim, did not exist as static or purely analytical structural entities, divorced from the moral development of societies. Durkheim's linkage of moral development to the social facts that were emerging in modern societies was not unique, however. The tradition of considering the consequences of modernization on moral development in societies was taken up in various and often theoretically productive ways by all the thinkers now defined as 'classical.' Weber (1904/1958) predicted—in a somewhat contradictory nondeterministic and yet morally condemning light—the rise of 'specialists without spirit; sensualists without heart' as a result of a 'spirit' of capitalism emerging from and then reducing to a utilitarian shell the societal power of religious belief. Even the strong sense of the 'goodness' of reason contained within the Enlightenment, the 'laughing heir' to these beliefs, Weber saw as 'irretrievably fading.'⁵ Marx saw one outcome of capitalistic development the social and moral isolation of self from others, in which

...the limits within every man can move without *harming* [italics in original] others are

determined by the law, just as the boundary between two fields is determined by a fence-post. This is the liberty of man as an isolated monad drawn into himself."⁶

For Durkheim, by contrast, the possibilities for moral development in the emerging world of modernity appeared uncertain and perhaps dangerous, but certainly open. The thread of this theme repeats through his early works (*The Division of Labor*, 1883; *Suicide*, 1897) to his final major work (*Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 1912).

Perhaps the clearest expression of Durkheim's organicist orientation toward moral development appears in two works that were published posthumously: *Sociologie et Philosophie* (1924/1974) and *L' Education Morale* (1925/1973). In these essays, Durkheim's belief in the primacy of structure over agency is firmly established, and represents one of his fundamental assumptions when attempting to account for the moral development of societies, whatever their stage of development.⁷ In *Moral Education*, Durkheim states this forcefully:

...[I]t is certainly true that the individual will seems to be controlled by a law not of its own making. The morality of our time is fixed in its essentials from the moment of our birth; the changes it undergoes during the course of an individual's life—those in which we can share—are infinitely limited. (1925/1973 106)

Durkheim does acknowledge the "conflict" between the demands of the changing nature of the collective 'moral conscience' and individual action, however, and his observations on this score indicate the beginnings of his own struggle to comprehend the more rapid transformations of moral action and belief demanded by the modern world. The individual actor in the modern world, according to Durkheim, may only understand his or her actions as being fully 'moral' if they are perceived to be autonomously expressed *apart* from the dictates of the collective moral will. As Isambert has observed, this echoes the Kantian position concern that

...the genuinely moral act must be performed through the *autonomy of the will* [italics in original]. (1993 205)

In this way, Durkheim distanced his theoretical position on morality from structural determinism and acknowledging the importance of agency:

Only an act we have performed in total freedom, without any kind of coercion, do we regard as wholly moral. But we are not free if the law by which we regulate our behavior is imposed upon us, if we have not freely desired it. (Durkheim 1925/1973 128)

This is the 'egoism' that Durkheim ascribed to modernity not only asserting itself, but legitimating its independent moral action. Thus, additional criteria for moral action are introduced in modern societies: An action is fully 'moral' if and only if the individual perceives other possibilities for action, yet acts against this in a way that he or she defines as 'moral.'

It is, of course, the basis for morality that Durkheim, during the rapid social changes that were just beginning during his time, saw as increasingly problematic. The emergence of alternative moral possibilities in itself constitutes a significant departure from earlier, less differentiated, less 'modern' societies, in which the collective moral action and that of the individual were essentially isomorphic.⁸ In *Sociology and Philosophy*, Durkheim began to speak of two

divergent moralities, the one now existing and the one in the process of becoming. (Durkheim 1974 59)

It is science (specifically, sociology), that can determine the nature and trajectory of these emerging 'moral facts,' and it is perhaps Durkheim's confidence in this ambitious sociological program to understand these facts that leads him to a normative stance:

Our science may help us to render these ideas more precise *and to direct them*. [italics added] (Durkheim 1974 59)

This normative tone is echoed in the final stages of *Suicide*, as Durkheim (1897/1951 391-392) exclaimed:

Once the existence of evil is proved, its nature and its source, and we consequently know the general features of the remedy and its point of application, the important

thing...is to set resolutely to work."⁹

It is somewhat ironic, however, that Durkheim's corpus reads "backwards" in his description of societal and moral development. His earliest work, *The Division of Labor*, is primarily concerned with the conditions for social integration and the resultant course of moral development in modern, "advanced" societies (cf. Morrison 1995). *Elementary Forms*, published nearly twenty years later, attempts to achieve an understanding of the basis for social order in what Durkheim termed the most 'primitive' of societies. As a result, there has been little agreement regarding the continuity of Durkheim's argument with respect to the relationship of social structure and individual moral development and action. Giddens (1971) has maintained that there was a logical progression in the ordering of Durkheim's ideas throughout the development of his works. Alexander (1989), in contrast, has observed that Durkheim's earliest work was concerned with technological developments coupled with an expanding division of labor that was productive of a certain form of social order. However, Alexander sees Durkheim's later thought shifting to more subjective, internal forces objectifying differing forms of social order. Nevertheless, what is clear is that Durkheim's last major work, *Elementary Forms*, addresses the moral foundation of less differentiated societies that possessed the character of "mechanical" solidarity. In these sorts of societies, moral conscience is collective and is founded in religious beliefs that are represented both in abstract and concrete forms by the totem.¹⁰ In his analysis of Australian aboriginal religion, Durkheim pointed out that this collective morality, or collective conscience, is represented quite clearly through the society's totemic images:

In other words, totemism is not the religion of certain animals, certain men, or certain images; it is the religion of a kind of anonymous and impersonal force that is identifiable in each of these beings but identical to none of them...The individuals die; the generations pass on and are replaced by others; but this force remains always present, alive, and the same. (1912/1995 5)

Durkheim suggested that this "force" is a moral one, and manifests a reality so pow-

erful that its effects are tangible in the everyday lives of individuals, including their beliefs and actions. In this way, the totem organizes the community, imbuing it with a distinctive and stable identity:

All the beings that participate in the same totemic principle consider themselves, by that very fact, to be morally bound to one another; they have definite obligations of assistance, vengeance, and so on toward each other, and it is these that constitute kinship. (Durkheim 1912/1995 5)

The analysis of this type of society enabled Durkheim to formulate his reductive structural argument: In its most "primitive" form, society functions very much like a simple organism. The bonds between the relatively undifferentiated elements of the social organism are held fast by a moral sentiment that manifests as a powerful force within the religious institution, which is perceived as permanent, uniting the community and defining its core identity; the conscience is thus truly collective. This is, in fact, a theme Durkheim first began to articulate in *The Division of Labor*:

The more primitive societies are, the more resemblances there are among the individuals who compose them. (1893/1964 133)

Social contracts among individuals are clearly defined: both linkages and hierarchies among individuals are determined, as Durkheim states in *The Division of Labor* as well as in *Forms*, in a purely fixed, "mechanical" way. The tacit assumption is made in Durkheim's argument that this mechanical nature involves action and thought that are reflexive—the authority and means for social action have been predetermined (similar to Weber's more poetic reference to the traditional authoritative guiding hand of the 'eternal yesterday') and operate in a relatively automatic and nonreflective manner that is seen to be immutable.

POPULATION INCREASE, MORAL DEVELOPMENT, AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

With the organic metaphor at the center of Durkheim's theory of social development, his subsequent task was to articulate the change from largely undifferentiated to highly differentiated, complex societies. How, given the

fact that a society is undifferentiated and the individuals in the collectivity see the traditional social order as unchanging (it is precisely change that can trigger the execution of often violent repressive law), can a society undergo transformation from 'simple' to 'complex'? And if a society changes, what are the subsequent changes in its moral development? These are first-order questions¹¹ that Durkheim is willing to confront squarely. Beginning with Australian aborigines, an undifferentiated, "primitive" society, he proceeded (in an essay written with Marcel Mauss) in a manner that proceeds along standard anthropological lines:

The most widespread form of social organization among these societies is well known. Each tribe is divided into two large fundamental sections, which we shall call moieties. Each society, in turn, comprises a certain number of clans...*the classification of things reproduces this classification of men*". [italics in original] (Durkheim & Mauss 1903/1963 10)

Not only is this a "classification of men," but it represents the moral basis for the foundation of social contracts between individuals. The social contract here is clearly non-utilitarian, and Durkheim argued forcefully against the utilitarian perspective even as societies transformed to modern forms of economic activity (cf. Rueshemeyer 1982).¹²

What serves as the primary mechanism of social transformation from mechanical societies to organic societies, from 'primitive' to 'modern,' was once again rooted in Durkheim's understanding of the organic nature of societies themselves:

The recent speculation in the philosophy of biology has ended by making us see in the division of labor a fact of a very general nature which the economists who first proposed it, never suspected. (1893/1964 40-41)

Relying on a Darwinian biological model for his explanation of social change, Durkheim incorporated, significantly, demographic and ecological factors to explain social change. In a very real sense, he was employing the same deductive strategy as Marx in explaining fundamental change—that significant quantitative change necessarily leads to

changes that are *qualitatively* different from their antecedents.

For Durkheim as for Marx, this qualitative change does not usually occur over short periods of time, and this is true for any population increase. As societies become more populous and concentrated (or, as Durkheim described it, "voluminous and condensed"), there is a greater chance for competition, and possibly, for conflict:

Darwin says that in a small area, opened to immigration, and where, consequently, the conflict of individuals must be acute, there is always to be seen a very great diversity in the species inhabiting it. (Durkheim 1893/1964 266)

If the species are of different types, then survival without conflict is possible—each develops a special niche which, beyond eliminating conflict over the same resources, also can produce symbiotic relationships benefiting each type. Thus, differentiation is the key to continued survival in an increasingly complex environment. This, according to Durkheim, is what will produce change in human populations as well:

Men must submit to the same law. In the same city, different occupations can co-exist without being obliged mutually to destroy one another, for they pursue different objects. (1893/1964 267)

Herein lies the survival mechanism that an increasing division of labor provides. However, if the occupations are similar in function (Durkheim supplied as an illustration the brewer and the wine-grower), then the possibility for destructive conflict obtains once again. One solution to this, however, brought Durkheim somewhat closer to considering the human condition as possessing a quality distinct from a purely automatic biological process: the development of communication. By this, he closely equated "communication" with commerce and improved transportation. If, for example, the wine-grower and the brewer are able to exploit new markets, this in turn will lead to the productive enhancement of both, reducing the potential for tension and conflict. It may, of course, also cause the division of labor to become further differentiated by requiring transportation, distribution, and marketing of

the product. This rationale for increase in the division of labor also marked his departure from the economists' perspective of his day:

The division of labor appears to us otherwise than it does to economists. For them, it essentially consists in greater production. For us, this greater productivity is only a necessary consequence, a repercussion of the phenomenon. (Durkheim 1893/1964 275)

As Durkheim described the process:

The division of labor is, then, a result of the struggle for existence, but it is a mellowed *denouement*. Thanks to it, opponents are not obliged to fight to a finish, but can exist one beside the other. Also...it furnishes the means of maintenance and survival to a greater number of individuals who, in more homogeneous societies, would be condemned to extinction. (1893/1964 260)

Durkheim's notion of how societies develop remained, in this passage, close to the distant, impersonal description of a biologist describing an organic process of growth. His thinking was, however, both more subtle and complex than this: Durkheim, through his engagement with the minds of his intellectual predecessors, understood the 'qualitative' side of the change as well. The web of social interaction and the form of social contracts required by the modern, highly differentiated social world of Durkheim's time had been irreversibly altered.

Durkheim's thought regarding the changes in the social contract as a result of this accommodation to population growth stemmed from several sources. Hobbes (d. 1679) posited that individuals formed social contracts through free association. The preservation of their 'natural rights,' however, necessitated the restraint that could only be imposed by a sovereign power. Locke (d. 1704) rejected the belief that a superior power which transcended and superseded individual social contracts was essential for the continued existence of a society. Locke also saw societal development being increasingly based on market transactions. Thus, Locke asserted that the civic associations, through the increasing number of market networks, were being increasingly transferred to the national level. Spencer (d. 1903) moved from

a utilitarian to an evolutionary approach to the social contract. With the decline of militaristic or absolute monarchical authority, societal integration was engendered primarily by increasing industrialization. There is an increasing decentralization as social contracts are based more on voluntary associations between individuals. Further, it was Spencer who reacted against Malthus' position that population growth constituted a danger to society. Instead, Spencer postulated that gains in population would actually contribute to social contracts between individuals that were marked by heightened voluntary cooperation and by formal contractual relations.

Durkheim's formulation of his notion of the social contract in the modern world was largely a reaction to these earlier positions. He concurred with Spencer that social contracts engaged in voluntarily by social actors were associated with a rising population and a growing division of labor. However, he disputed the position of Enlightenment thinkers (such as Locke) that social cohesion could be established merely through the willed interactions of individuals, apart from any overriding structural influences. This might occur on occasion, but it could not account for a fully-developed social system. Nor does the modern condition necessarily lead to any sense of personal sense of fulfillment, 'enlightenment,' or happiness (Durkheim 1893/1964 275). Further, Durkheim recognized the existence of 'noncontractual foundations' of the social contract. By this, he meant that though a social contract might *appear* to be engaged in voluntarily and ended in the same manner, this is not the case in modern societies—as evidenced by the emergence of contract and civil law. Thus, the division of labor does not simply signal a transformation of a society from a reliance on the collective to reliance on the individual; in fact it represents a shift—and very possibly a decline—in the collective solidarity of a people, and is the basis on which individual 'autonomy' (or perceived autonomy) rests. A Durkheimian perspective of the world would, at this point, largely abandon an emphasis on the 'collective conscience' so apparent in less differentiated societies. Moral action in these societies was readily known, rooted in religious symbolism which was easily communicated between and across generations, and transgressions against the collective

morality were based on repression rather than restitution. However, in a modern society moral action becomes less transparent, less certain. When moral action remains collective, it is less centered in religion than in law, which becomes increasingly restitutive. Egoism replaces altruism, social solidarity and thus the moral order becomes jeopardized. Thus, the role of the sociologist is not only to understand changes in moral development, to become actively engaged in the debate over its direction, which was once determined but has now become increasingly tenuous.

DURKHEIMIAN MODERNITY AND MORALITY IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

Having established that the division of labor now forms the basis for social organization in modern, 'organic' societies, and having acknowledged the problem of maintaining any sense of moral order in modern societies, Durkheim saw that morality would be grounded in new social contracts engendered by the increasing social differentiation. His rhetorical question at the outset of *The Division of Labor*, began his discussion:

Briefly, is the division of labor, at the same time that it is a law of nature, also a moral rule of human conduct; and if it has this latter character, why and in what degree? (Durkheim 1893/1964 41)

Durkheim then came quickly to the point: to be 'moral' in modern society is to conform to the emerging patterns of the social organism. To hearken back to earlier social forms would be, if not 'immoral,' certainly an exercise in futility and ignorance. The day of the 'Renaissance Man' had irrevocably ended:

The time has passed when the perfect man was he who appeared interested in everything without attaching himself exclusively to anything... (Durkheim 1893/1964 42)

Miller (2002 56) has summarized Durkheim's argument: "The division of labor is moral, therefore, if it is a force for solidarity."¹³ Durkheim's passionate, harshly critical judgment regarding the uselessness of acting in concert with the dictates of earlier cultural milieu is rooted in his evolutionary, structural organicism. The primacy of structure is evident; it has evolved to a new stage

and it now is the responsibility for individuals to orient themselves with the emerging social developments. Durkheim was emphatic regarding one's duty to face these conditions, eschewing the comfortable but dying society of the past:

We distrust those excessively mobile talents that lead themselves equally to all uses, refusing to choose a special role and keep to it. We disapprove of those men whose unique care is to organize and develop all their faculties, but without making any definite use of them, and without sacrificing any of them, as if each man were sufficient unto himself, and constituted an independent world. *It seems to us that this state of detachment and indetermination has something anti-social about it* [italics added]...The praiseworthy man of former times is only a dilettante to us, and we refuse to give dilettantism any moral value... (Durkheim 1893/1964 42)

Durkheim followed this with what could be an ode to the modern world, or could have just as easily become the theoretical foil to the preface of Whyte's *Organization Man* of the 1950's. Against the individual of the past who was self-contained and a generalist, Durkheim praised the coming of the new, "modern" individual:

...we rather see perfection in the man seeking, not to be complete, to but to produce; who has a restricted task, and devotes himself to it; who does his duty, accomplishes his work. 'To perfect oneself,' says Secretan, 'is to learn one's role, to become capable of fulfilling one's function.' [Thus] the categorical imperative of the moral conscience is assuming the following form: *Make yourself usefully fulfill a determinate function.*" [Italics in original] (Durkheim 1893/1964 42-43)

In this passage written early in his career, Durkheim was bold and confident. The emerging useful members of society will not be Weber's vacuous 'specialists without spirit;' they will find fulfillment in their duty to society, which has lawfully and seemingly naturally developed out of an earlier form. This is in contrast to his somewhat more measured comments of the 'late' Durkheim; for example, only a few years before his

death, he remarked that:

The old ideals and the divinities which incarnate them are dying because they no longer respond sufficiently to the new aspirations of our day; and the new ideals which are necessary to orient our life are not yet born. (Bellah 1973)

Thus the later, 'mature' Durkheim was no less structural in his orientation, but he seemed less certain that the structure provided the clear sense of moral duty that he had earlier proclaimed. This of course was echoed in his concern with the growing anomie and egoism in society that in turn led to the social pathologies that were so masterfully expressed in *Suicide*. Durkheim adhered until the end of his life to the utility of the organic model in describing the development of social life and the resultant shifting moral duties of individuals. If, however, there is a 'postmodern' age that supercedes modernism, of what utility is a metaphor of this sort, that describes moral development in terms of an 'organism' which, if not breaking down, appears to be losing its coherence? Bernstein (1992) and others have identified several themes of postmodernism, all of which appear to run counter to Durkheim's assumptions regarding society. Among the most serious challenges to a purely Durkheimian perspective include: the failure of any overarching metanarrative or 'grand metaphor' to explain social life; the failure of the social sciences to provide solutions—or meaningful analyses—to emerging social problems; and that cultural debates, conflicts, and dissolution are intensifying, rendering any theoretical model based on consensual social contracts improbable. To these must be added three other critical observations regarding his theory. First—and ironically, given Durkheim's emphasis on the structural, organic processes of society—his differentiation theory allows for little conscious control at this level. His treatment of individual social contracts that flow from these, by contrast, can be seen as highly conscious and interactive, though bound within their structural frameworks (cf. Alexander 1986). Second, Durkheim clearly underplayed the importance of technological innovation and diffusion in assessing changes in moral development. Third, mere population growth, considered independently

of other factors such as technological innovation and economic prosperity, loses its utility in leading to differentiation through the increasing division of labor that Durkheim has postulated.

But the relevance of Durkheim's keen sense of social change as described within an organic model of development, his awareness of the linkage between social contracts and social structure and the 'moral density' that can be engendered by shifts in population cannot be eliminated by dismissing him as a 'classical' theorist of a modernity whose relevance has long since passed away. It was Durkheim above all others writing during his time who acknowledged that the ground on which the moral foundations of society rested was shifting in ways that left the future open. In the face of claims that the social sciences cannot adequately assess the moral shifts that are thus engendered, one may offer as a reminder the power of Durkheim's comparative analysis of suicide. Irrespective of its methodological shortcomings, his work revealed an entirely different conceptual landscape that retains its utility in understanding the nature of suicide. The organic metaphor also retains theoretical value, if conjoined with the idea that structures, once created, are in fact the creation of individuals who retain interest in the survival of that structure, often shaping the social and moral development of entire societies as a result. Lyotard's (1984) remarks regarding the perseverance of the state provides a salient example. As social differentiation continues, new patterns of organizational life develop—often driven by technological innovations that in turn accelerate the differentiation process itself—and these developments may create new systems of morality that are either divorced from, or in direct opposition to, the interests of the state. In this case the legitimation of the state is jeopardized, and its adherents must reconstitute new rationales to unify these increasingly disparate entities. Lyotard suggests that the mechanism employed by the state toward this end is to instill in each group—no matter how inherently disaffected or alienated from the state—a sense of fear or terror of external forces, and offer strategies for controlling or eliminating that fear or terror. This line of thought is clearly Durkheimian and modernist in its orientation, as opposed to postmodernist.

Durkheim's thought may in fact form the

intellectual template on which new sociological theories that combine both modernist and postmodernist perspectives of social change and moral development can be formulated.

- As societies shift from a modernist to a postmodernist phase, contracts that were based on earlier traditions will be eclipsed or modified. These will include such 'basic' social contracts such as marital contracts, which will broaden in scope with their terms more negotiable, and contracts within the workplace with both employees and employers engaging in constant shifts in conditions of employment, locations, and requirements regarding skills.
- Population decreases in postmodern societies will lead to new forms of 'moral density' as social contracts become less concrete and more 'virtual.' The importance of face-to-face interactions that were once required to form social contracts and set moral limits to behavior will diminish. This will in turn reshape the developmental trajectories of structural, political, and religious institutions.
- If, as Durkheim posits, the division of labor is the basis for an individual's personal identity and provides the basis for the formation of social contracts, then data showing that individuals change jobs and career tracks become potentially meaningful in new ways. It indicates that not only will identities change with participation in a particular form of labor, but that these identities will become less stable as job and career changes become more frequent. It also means that, as social contracts are rapidly formed and re-formed, increasing flexibility of expectations regarding emerging norms of conduct will be mandated. Positively, this may result in increased tolerance of diverging social values and behaviors; negatively, it can mean that morality (classically conceived) becomes shallowly rooted or replaced by legal mechanisms.

Thus, just as the distinction between 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' is increasingly seen to be artificial, as both forms exist simultaneously in society, the traditional distinction between 'classical' and 'contemporary' theoretical perspectives remains innocent of a useful synergy that can develop new

theoretical perspectives. This is particularly true when analyzing labyrinthine phenomena such as moral development, which is founded on so many complex institutional arrangements that change at differing rates, are subject to widely diverse sets of influences and often not in a linear or progressive fashion (cf. Moore 1979). A Durkheimian perspective, conscious of this increasingly intricate interplay of social factors, and serving constantly to remind us of the power of structural forces surrounding the moral development of societies, will not lose its contribution to contemporary efforts to understand these processes. Durkheim's notions of social contracts and collective solidarity may illuminate an understanding of postmodern society if, true to Durkheim's openness to societal change, we recognize the new forms that social contracts and collective morality can take. However, a Durkheimian perspective would hold that a "global society" would have to achieve a certain degree of moral consensus, and without this a global society would become increasingly pathological and subject to disintegration. The focus of 'new Durkheimians' would thus center on investigations of emerging international institutions and international laws, and the degree of consensus or anomie and conflict these would engender.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ There are, of course, a plethora of references in which this honorific may be found. However, there are also several excellent publications that convincingly explicate the reasons *why* Durkheim remains a force in sociology. See, for example, Don Martindale's *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory* (1988); Richard Muench's *Sociological Theory, Volume One: From the 1850's to the 1920's* (1994).
- ² See especially Foucault's discussion on pp. 108-109 in his 1969 address entitled "What is an Author?" which is included in *Textual Strategies*, edited by Josue V. Harari (1979).
- ³ It was Martindale (1988 99) who locates Durkheim's intellectual development in this genre, along with that of Toennies and Redfield.
- ⁴ There are, of course, several notable exceptions. For example, Duff and Lawrence's (1995) article, "Age Density, Religiosity, and Death Anxiety in Retirement Communities" found support for Durkheim's assertion that collective ritual reduces anomie within the group and fosters mutual support.
- ⁵ Despite Weber's commitment to the principle of 'value freedom,' his concluding remarks to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* belie his unequivocal faithfulness to this daunt-

ing standard.

- ⁶ These were comments made by the "early" Marx, in his *Comment on the Jewish Question* (a somewhat sympathetic critique of Bruno Bauer) in 1844.
- ⁷ In many respects, Durkheim's position with respect to the 'agency/structure' issue remains less confounding (and conflating) than far more recent efforts. See, for example, Alexander's "Some Remarks on 'Agency' in Recent Sociological Theory" (1992), which also makes this point.
- ⁸ There is something of a contradiction in Durkheim's thought that has remained largely unexplored here. If, as Durkheim stated, morality is uniformly and universally expressed in societies characterized by mechanical solidarity, the need for repressive laws would be far less acute than he posited.
- ⁹ Durkheim not only advocated the necessity of providing sociological answers to societal problems, he was actively involved in providing them, perhaps moreso than any other sociologist during his time or any other. Giddens (1978 22-23), for example, has remarked that: The convergence between [Durkheim's] sociology and the official ideology of republicanism was so great that some contemporary critics spoke caustically of the pervasive hold of 'State Durkheimianism' in the educational system."
- ¹⁰ Durkheim believed that societies with totemic religions were more elementary, more "fundamental" than animistic societies because a comparative analysis demonstrated that totemic societies, no matter where they were practiced, demonstrated highly similar characteristics. This led Durkheim to conclude that an underlying principle of social organization in totemic societies lay at the heart of social organization taken as a whole (Morrison 1995).
- ¹¹ First-order questions are those which do not come with prescribed methods for obtaining an answer. They can, of course, engender highly creative and seminal often explanations by minds willing to take them on after formulating them. See Adler and van Doren's explanation of the role of first-order questions in the chapter entitled "How to Read Philosophy" in their *How to Read a Book* (1972).
- ¹² This, of course, is directly antithetical to Weber's thesis that a utilitarian ethic had, long before Durkheim's writing, colored all social contracts in modern societies.
- ¹³ Even more forcefully, Schmaus (2004 134) has stated that, for Durkheim, "...human society as we know it would not be possible without the idea of moral obligation."

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