
The Sociology of Emile Durkheim

- Structural Functionalism
 - Vs. Conflict theory
 - Views on the individual
 - Deviance, Crime and Punishment
 - Cognition, Meaning, and Knowledge (religion)
 - Mechanical Solidarity
 - Organic Solidarity
 - Anomie
 - Social Facts
 - Suicide
 - *Egoistic, Altruistic, Anomic, Fatalistic*
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Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)



- First French academic sociologist
- Descended from a long line of Rabbis, became agnostic
- Father of modern structural-functionalism
- Also pioneered sociology of knowledge
- Major works include:
 - *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893)
 - *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895)
 - *Suicide* (1897)
 - *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912)

Theoretical Premises...

■ POSITIVISM

- Observable, knowable laws that govern society (first to draw on statistical trends!)

■ FUNCTIONALISM

- A focus on society, *sui generis* (unique, in-and-of itself)
- Society as a **system**
- Parts are **inseparably interrelated**
- Interrelatedness of “**functions**” and “roles”
- Existence of a “healthy” and “normal” state: **equilibrium**
- Tendency of all parts of a system to reorganize to restore equilibrium

**** Examples of “functional systems”? What makes the systems “functional”?**

■ SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

- Individual life, feelings, thoughts, actions determined by SOCIETY
- Collective life → INDIVIDUALISM (vs. Hobbes, Marx)
- Individual = a depository of social forces

Roots of Functionalism

- **August Comte (1798-1857)**
 - ❑ Comparing social and biological systems
 - ❑ Harmony, pathology, and equilibrium: **homeostasis**
 - ❑ Comparative method
- **Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)**
 - ❑ **Evolutionary theory** of social differentiation
 - ❑ Mutual interdependence of unlike parts in a system
- **Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)**
 - ❑ Social organisms like physiochemical systems
 - ❑ **Dynamic equilibrium**: systems adapt while undergoing change

**** *Are social systems like biological or chemical systems?***

Solidarity

- CORE PROBLEM: **integration** of individuals into the **social order** (*the problem of order and COMMITMENT to SOCIAL HEALTH*)

** *Why is this a problem???*

** *What is solidarity? Where does solidarity come from???*

- Integration is based on **social solidarity**
 - Refers to the quality of social bonds
 - Solidarity depends on **social equilibrium**
 - Requires **regulation** in advanced societies
 - The basis for **MORAL ORDER!!**
 - A secular alternative to religious order
 - Also the basis for individual **HAPPINESS!!**
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Two kinds of solidarity

■ Mechanical solidarity

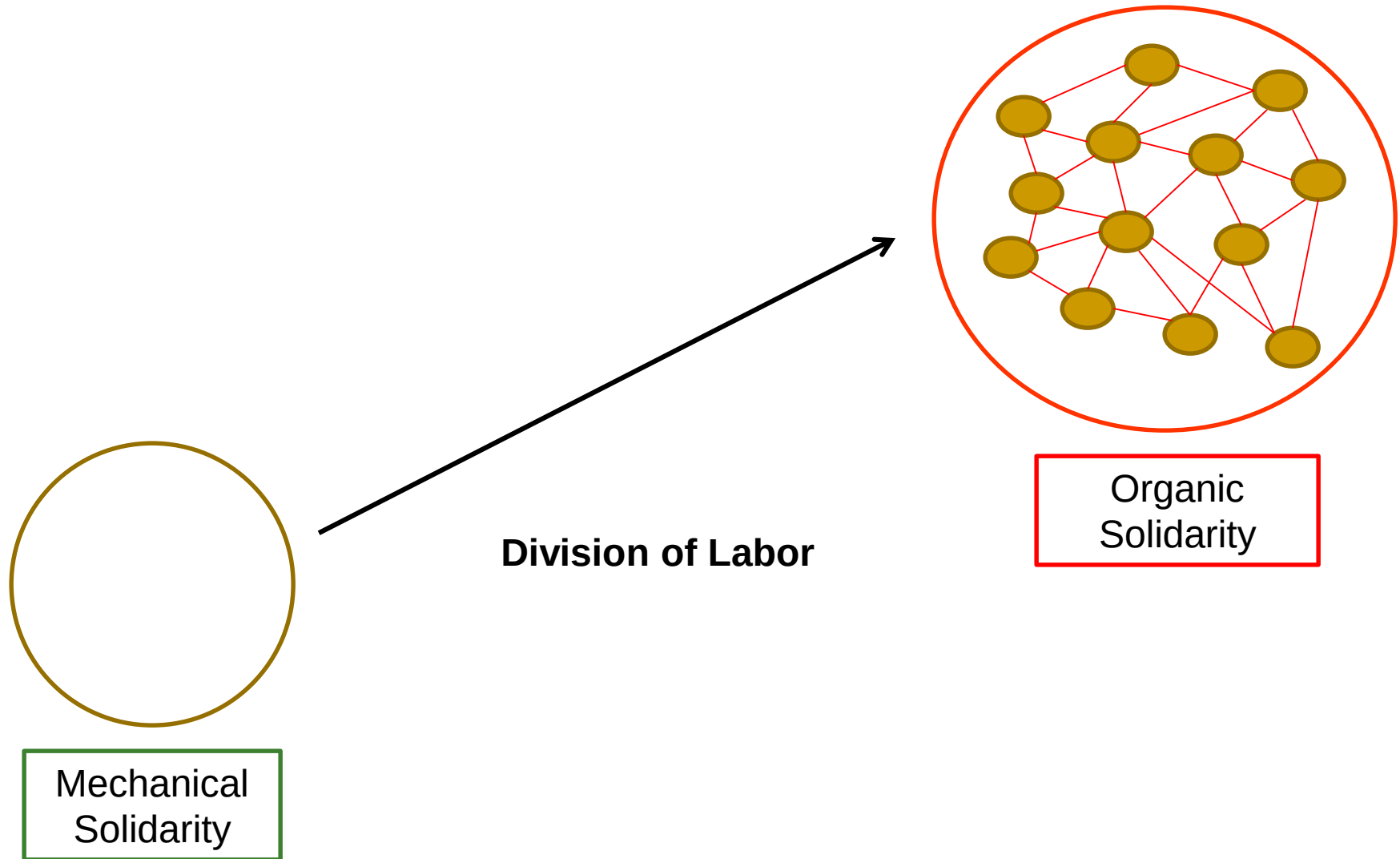
- **Traditional** societies
- **“Solidarity by similarity”**:
no division of labor
- Integration through
**“collective
consciousness”**
(everyone automatically
shares the same beliefs,
ideas, and sentiments)

Durkheim made this distinction historically....

**** Does mechanical solidarity exist today? Where? Is it a useful concept?
(religion, patriotism, sports fans, insular societies)**

**** What about organic solidarity?**

Mechanical and Organic Solidarity



Two kinds of solidarity

■ Mechanical solidarity

- **Traditional** societies
- “**Solidarity by similarity**”:
no division of labor
- Integration through
“**collective consciousness**”
(everyone automatically
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■ Organic solidarity

- **Modern** societies
- Role differentiation:
division of labor
- Differentiation increases bonds
b/c of **interdependence**
- ALSO: Integration through
“**collective ideals**” = **linked minds! Psychic links!**
- Norms and MORAL VALUES
internalized through institutions:
religion, family, education.

Durkheim made this distinction historically....

**** *Does mechanical solidarity exist today? Where? Is it a useful concept? (religion, patriotism, sports fans, insular societies)***

**** *What about organic solidarity?***

Deviance

- Deviance is defined socially
 - **How does this contradict psychological theories?*
- Occurs when some individual or group violates a social norm

EXAMPLES:

- Crime
- Mental Illness
- Sexual eccentricities

Key idea: there is nothing *inherently* or *naturally* wrong with any behavior said to be deviant.

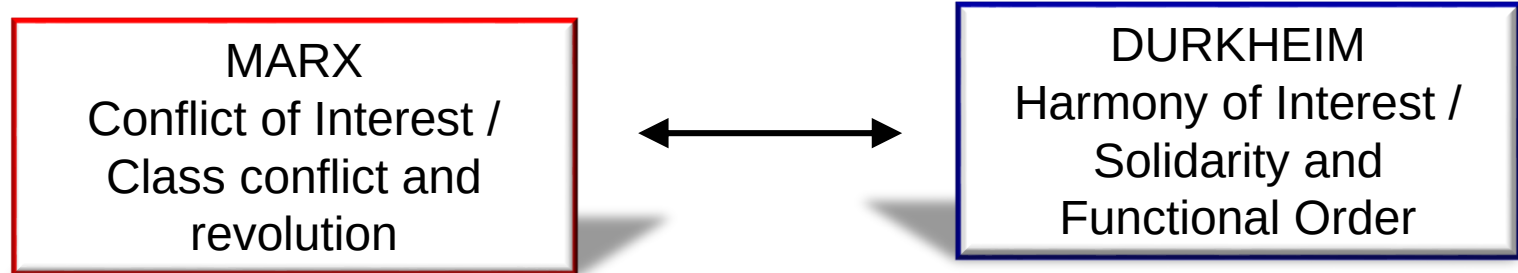
*****How do these violate regularities of behavior? Shared values?***

Anomie

- A social condition defined by...
 - ❑ The absence of social bonds, breakdown in solidarity
 - ❑ A consequent normlessness
 - ❑ The need for greater social regulation (with DOL) to maintain the healthy functioning of society
 - ❑ The parts of society do not communicate well / work well together

* ***Examples of anomie???*** - on a national level? - on a family level?

Different theoretical lenses



A New Moral Order

- **FREEDOM** = following laws of society, embracing dependence on other people
 - **State** = defender of collective consciousness
 - **DUTY** = to fulfill a function, contribute to health of whole society
 - **HAPPINESS** = requires moral constraints
 - **MORALITY** (imparted by education)
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Social Facts

- **SOCIAL FACTS**, not psychological individualism
- The proper SUBJECT MATTER of sociology
- Ways of “**acting, thinking, and feeling**” that
 - Exist outside and independently of any individual
 - Are imposed on / deposited in individuals
 - Unfelt when we conform, felt clearly when we **resist, violate** ****Why?**
- A Social FORCE that
 - Pushes us toward the NORM -- CONFORMITY
 - Punishes us for violations!!

“If I do not **conform** to **ordinary conventions**, if in my **mode of dress** I pay no heed to what is **customary** in my country and in my social class, the laughter I provoke, the **social distance** at which I am kept, produce, although in more mitigated form, the same results as any real penalty.” (51)

Social Facts (continued)

They consist of “manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they **exercise control** over him.” (52)

- ❑ Placed in the minds of individuals, but
- ❑ Rooted in society, sui generis

“Any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an **external constraint** which is **general over the whole** of a given society whilst having an **existence of its own, independent** of its individual manifestations.” (59)

****EXAMPLES??**

- TWO VARIANTS (correspond to 2 forms of solidarity):
 - generally manifest and partially manifest