**SOC 3150: Classical Sociological Theory**

**Lecture 13: Durkheim: The Division of Labour in Society**

The *Division of Labour in Society* (1880’s - 1893), Durkheim’s first major work, developed a new way of thinking about society, one that attempted to use the new “science” of sociology to consider the “moral crisis” of his age.

For example, in less than 100 years since the French Revolution:

* France had gone through 3 monarchies, 2 empires, and 3 republics. There had been 14 separate constitutions.
* France had suffered a crushing defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870), followed by the violent revolution expressed in the Paris Commune
* The emphasis on individual rights often expressed itself in attacks on traditional authority/religious belief
* Many felt that social order itself was threatened because people only thought about themselves, not society

Durkheim’s Goals:

1. To inquire about the nature of the links between:

(a) the individual and society; and

(b) the social bonds connecting individuals to each other;

1. To examine the specific nature of these social bonds and how they were related to the overall function/cohesion of society; and
2. To see if the system of social links changes as society becomes more advanced and subject to changes in the division of labour.

Key question: “Why do individuals, while becoming more autonomous, depend more upon society? How can they be at once more individual and solidary”?

Durkheim’s focus is squarely on *social solidarity*, defined variously as:

1. The system of social bonds that link individuals to society (otherwise they would develop separately);
2. Social relations linking individuals to each other and society as a whole;
3. The system of social interchanges that go beyond economic transactions to include a vast network of social relations and acts that link individuals together in some form of social unity; and
4. The degree of social integration that linked individuals to social groups outside themselves.

**Mechanical and Organic Solidarity:**

Unlike Comte, who argued that increasing division of labour undermined the common experiences of people, and thereby common moral beliefs, Durkheim argued that increased division of labour actually creates a *new* kind of social solidarity

Durkheim’s thesis is that modern society is not held together by the similarities between people who do basically similar things, but by pulling them together by forcing them to *depend on each other*, creating a feeling of solidarity beyond mere economic necessity

Durkheim was thus interested in the changes in how society is held together and in how people see themselves as part of a whole as the division of labour increases.

He outlines this by describing two types of solidarity: *mechanical* and *organic.*

*Mechanical solidarity* (traditional societies). Characteristics:

1. A homogenous population which is small and isolated
2. A division of labour based on social cooperation, with little or no specialization
3. A system of social institutions in which religion is dominant
4. A system of beliefs which is uniformly diffused throughout society, creating uniformity in attitudes and actions
5. A low degree of individual autonomy
6. A social organization where the individual’s place in society is determined by kinship
7. A system of penal law based on repressive sanctions which punish individual infractions swiftly and violently, reaffirming core beliefs and values
8. A system of social cohesion producing a high degree of consistency in values, beliefs, individual attitudes, and actions
9. A state in which individualism is at its lowest point of development
10. A system of social links between individuals based on custom, obligation, and sentiment

However, as society evolves away from such traditional forms and becomes characterized by a more complex division of labour, individuals become more reliant on, and increasingly linked to each other to perform social and economic tasks they are not able to carry out themselves. They become more *interdependent* through specialization.

This is what Durkheim refers to as *organic solidarity* (modern societies), where there is an increase in the density of society due to the expansion of population, the growth of cities, and the development of transportation and communication. Characteristics:

1. Larger populations spread over broader geographic areas
2. An increased complexity of division of labour leading to specialized economic functions where individuals are more reliant on others to perform economic functions they cannot perform themselves
3. A system of social relations where individuals are linked to each other by contract rather than by sentiment and obligation
4. A system in which individuals obtain their place in society by occupation rather than by kinship affiliation
5. An increased individual autonomy based on a system of laws recognizing rights and freedoms of individuals
6. The development of contract law predicated on restitutive sanctions in which judicial rules redress social wrongs.

**The Common Conscience:**

Durkheim went on to argue that each type of society was held together by a body of beliefs, practices and collective sentiments held in common by all its members.

Referred to as the “common conscience,” such beliefs were diffused throughout society, defined social purposes, give meaning to action, and generally structure the pattern of social life.

It was not an expression of individual consciousness, but a “determinate system” of ideas and beliefs, analytically separate from it, that fosters social likenesses among members of society.

Serving as the main “organ” of society, this common conscience pervades its collective space (physical and geographic). It creates common conditions of existence, functions to connect successive generations to each other, and defines individual relations to each other and to society in the form of binding obligations

Four interrelated characteristics of the common conscience:

1. *Volume*: the pervasiveness of collective beliefs and the degree to which they extend throughout society as a whole (e.g. do they envelop the individual? Are they intrusive? Something less?)
2. *Intensity*: the degree of leverage collective beliefs exert over individuals.
3. *Determinateness*: the amount of resistance offered by collective beliefs and how willingly they give way to change.
4. *Content*: the dominant characteristic of the society and its collective disposition (e.g. religious vs. secular).

Next class: Causes of the division of labour, law and social solidarity, individualism, and abnormal developments.