**SOC 3150: Classical Sociological Theory**

**Lecture 19: Durkheim: Religion and Ritual III**

* Today I want to wrap up our discussion of Durkheim generally, and his work on religion and ritual in particular. I will cover three things:

1. Randall Collins’ contemporary extension of Durkheim’s ideas to the study of emotion;
2. My struggles over extending Durkheim’s ideas on the collective conscience/religion to society today;
3. Criticisms of Durkheim’s work more generally.

* Each will be dealt with in turn.

**(1) Randall Collins: Ritual & Emotion:**

\* Durkheim’s work on religion *implied* an emotional basis to social order (“collective effervescence”). In effect, Durkheim suggested that social solidarity rests on shared ritual sentiment.

\* Randall Collins’ (1990) model of ritual interaction extends this idea.

He claims that an emotional ritual interaction has the following key elements:

1. A group of at least two assembled face to face;

2. Focus of attention upon the same object or activity, and mutual awareness of each other’s attention;

3. Members share a common mood (short term emotion);

4. The production of feelings of solidarity as a result of this emotional coordination (long term mood).

5. Rituals shape cognitions.

\* Long-term outcomes= “emotional energy”

- this operates on a continuum: confidence/enthusiasm/self-esteem to depression/lack of initiative/negative self feelings

- social group = the point of reference

\* Interaction rituals may be successful or unsuccessful. This varies depending on variations in:

(a) ecological factors;

(b) motivational factors; and

(c) material resources necessary for staging rituals.

**Power Rituals:**

\* Power = all factors that bring people together who are unequal in their resources such that some give orders and others take orders.

\* Order givers take the initiative and gain emotional energy

\* Order takers may be required to take part and have feelings of weakness, depression, and fear.

\* Each share an orientation toward dominant symbols:

- order givers, often politically conservative, identify symbolic ideals

- order takers alienated from them: “negative sacred objects.”

\* Between extremes: order transmitters and egalitarian exchanges

**Status Rituals:**

\* Status: refers to continuum of centrality or peripherality in groups

- People at center experience more emotional energy

- People on fringe the opposite

- Types of status groups: same/local/exclusive vs. several/loose

network/cosmopolitan (former stronger emotional energy)

**Effects on Long-Term Emotions: Emotional Energy:**

\* Interaction ritual model: people acquire/lose emotional energy in both power and status interactions

\* Interaction rituals connected in *chains*, feeding back on each other, throughout the social structure.

\* Emotional energy accumulates positively or negatively over time.

\* The main long-term emotional energies resulting from stratified interactions are:

(a) High levels of enthusiasm, confidence and initiative, resulting from either power or status dimensions;

(b) Low levels of the same (i.e. depression, shame) resulting from either power or status;

(c) anger, which results from moderate levels of negative experiences, particularly on the power dimension (i.e. when there are sufficient possibilities of fighting back.)

\* Collins’ model is an interesting elaboration of Durkheim’s ideas on religion and ritual, but only in relation to a limited number of emotions.

**(2) Thoughts on Durkheim, the Conscience Collective, and Religion in Today’s Society:**

* There are at least two positions that can be taken on Durkheim’s idea of the collective conscience in relation to today’s society:

1. The disintegrative view; and
2. The reintegrative view.

* The *disintegrative* would emphasize how our society has come to increasingly reflect something akin to organic solidarity with a weak collective conscience:
  + This is characterized by interdependence, yet great dissimilarity between individuals, a breakdown or decline in shared, orienting ideas such as religion, loss of community/ social capital (Putnam), widespread distrust of major political institutions, rampant individualism, (egoism and anomie), and a growing host of social problems.
  + Examples: the growing culture of fear today reflected in child-rearing practices, widespread concerns over liability, increasing intrusion of bureaucracies into private space to compensate.
* The *reintegrative* view, in contrast, would suggest not so much a breakdown in social order, but that, over time, we have developed a new form of social order with a different type of collective conscience:
  + Examples: the officially sanctioned celebration of diversity, multiculturalism, and human rights – with institutions to promote and enforce them – in today’s Western Societies.
  + Simultaneously, within this structured, orienting ideological framework/consciousness collective, religion has not so much declined as diversified. Thus, if we define religion as an orienting, moral belief system for action, beyond the increased diversity of traditional religions in the West, we also have belief systems like environmentalism, feminism, libertarianism, etc, being utilized in this way.
* Problems going too far with either stance (e.g. critics of multiculturalism suggest balkanization rather than social integration in some cases). The truth is somewhere in the middle.
* Thus, one must retain a critical, empirically informed stance on what are complex, ongoing developments where an emerging conscience collective is often playing catch-up with social diversification.

1. **Standard Criticisms of Durkheim’s Work:**

* Functionalism:
  + While only an “occasional functionalist,” Durkheim’s ideas played a role in the development of functionalism, the favored, conservative sociological standpoint in the 1950’s
  + While Durkheim recognized the problems inherent in the organic analogy and claiming a social fact served an overall function – and suggested a focus on antecedent processes and historical causes - functionalist work was plagued by the twin logical problems of tautology and false teleology.
* Positivism:
  + Durkheim has been criticized for accepting the view that social facts/society can – and should – be studied
  + with the same methods as the natural sciences.
  + While valid in some ways, this is somewhat unfair, as he didn’t believe in universal laws.
  + Yet it may not be possible to approach “social facts” with complete, detached objectivity (e.g. interpretation of suicides).
* Human nature:
  + Durkheim assumes that people are impelled by their passions into a search for gratification that only can be found, yet regulated in society. This individualistic/ biological assumption is not justified, though serving as the basis for his entire theoretical project.
  + Durkheim downplayed the role of consciousness largely in favor of the determinative power of social facts, downplaying the role of autonomy/agency.
* Morality:
  + Durkheim saw morality as the driving force behind, and ultimate goal of sociology (a ``science of morality``)
  + A so-called science that attempts to determine what should be done from what now exists is inherently conservative.