

Sociological Theory I

Week 7. Durkheim: Suicide, Religion, Knowledge

1. Briefly summarize Durkheim's concept of "anomie" and discuss the role that this concept plays in Durkheim's analysis of suicide. Contrast Durkheim's concept of "anomie" with Marx's concept of "alienation." How do these two concepts illustrate fundamental differences between Durkheim and Marx in terms of their general theories of society and their prescriptions for social change?

2. Written shortly after *Rules of Sociological Method*, *Suicide* is often taken as a model of Durkheim's methodological approach to sociological research. Critically evaluate *Suicide* from a methodological standpoint. Is Durkheim's use of empirical evidence persuasive? Is Durkheim's analysis consistent with the principle of methodological individualism (see Little, chapter 9), and, if so, what kind of "microfoundations" might plausibly be cited as the causal mechanisms underpinning Durkheim's "macroexplanation?"

3. What, according to Durkheim, constitutes the "essence" of religion (see Giddens, chapter 8)? How persuasive is Durkheim's argument that neither belief in the supernatural nor in gods is a defining feature of religion? How applicable is Durkheim's analysis of the nature and functions of religion to contemporary religious beliefs and practices?

4. What argument does Durkheim make regarding the relationship between science and religion? Critically evaluate Durkheim's attempt to reconcile the beliefs of religion with the ideas of science. Contrast Durkheim's views on religion (and its relation to science) with those of Marx.