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selective sociological and psychological aspects of the «social» phenomenon of anomie

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Durkheim's perspective

In search for the meaning of anomie, we are considering initially Durkheim's basic concepts on the subject.

The meaning of anomie with its consequences, has been analysed and developed by Durkheim's theoretical as well as methodological approach. According to him, the most important characteristics of the human being is that he accepts the moral in the social science bonds rather than the physical. So, he is governed not by a material environment but by a conscience superior to his own, the superiority of which he feels. His existence is superior to his body, but is a member of the society. When society is disrupted by a profound crisis or by beneficent transitions, it is incapable momentarily to control the situation. In this particular moment the state of anomie appears. So, from the first view, Durkheim's study of suicide which comes in high rates during this momentarily social deregulation, and is considered as one of the most important consequences of anomie is an attempt to provide an exegesis of his apparent conception of social facts. Durkheim attempts to seek the cause of suicide directly in the «moral structure» of society and independent of organic predispositions of the member of unstable people. So the suicide rates appears to be viewed in anti-reductionist terms.* Sociology is thus perceived as a discipline with a distinct phenomena for investigation, that cannot be accounted in terms of the biological and psychological levels of analysis. In Durkheim's mind, the idea of anomie is introduced as the opposite of the idea of social solidarity, just as social solidarity being in a state of collective ideological integration with anomie is a state of confusion, insecurity, «normlessness.» Thus, anomie seems to have the meaning of the state of the deregulation, a property of the social system.¹ This formulation has left Durkheim perhaps vulnerable to the charge that he is endorsing a group consciousness of social control. This is of course contrary to those contemporary sociologists who are opposing any tinge of metaphysics in their attempt to maintain a purely logical positivist stance remaining rather silent about the metaphysical assumptions underlying their own position. Perhaps the culturologist Leslie White is correct in suggesting that the idea of group consciousness is simply an

* Anti-reductionist approach is a term known to certain sociological milieu having no psychological aspects. G. Homans is considered as reductionist, C. R. Mills as anti-reductionist.

1. Durkheim Emile, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. New York; The Free Press, 1968, pp. 252-254.

awkward image and that what its adherents were saying is essentially correct.

Certainly the concept of culture provides a less mystical image and it sounds more acceptable to say that culture may be treated as it has a life of its own and to be considered as a distinct level of organization. According to L. White the culture and its functional aspects is to regulate the adjustment of man as an animal species to his natural habitat.¹

The terms Durkheim uses, collective authority, collective conscience and the like, to explain apparently the external regulating force, do not seem any more difficult to conceive than the construct «culture.» There should be no serious problem as long as one recognizes that he is talking about an on going situation. One may note the operation of the external forces in an on going situation without determining the source of origin of the constraint. While it is important to appreciate what Durkheim was attempting to say without obscuring his argument because of the unfavorable image that can be drawn from it, one may raise some rather relevant objections to his apparent emphasis on the social structure as a generating force. The emphasis on the social facts, looks like it has been used to free man from biological, geographic and various other determinisms, and to make man subject to a cultural determinism according to L. White.

For Durkheim, social facts are the data of sociology, and there are ways of acting capable of exercising an external constraint on the individual. So the society appears to be a collective consciousness which creates values and imposes them as imperative ideals on the individual.²

other views on the concept of anomie

Alex Inkeles provides a cogent argument for the necessity of including an intervening variable between the state, condition or structure of society and the rate that is to be explained in terms of the social fact as a phenomenon sui generis.

«... it is unintentional that to describe the standard model of sociological analysis, I have used a set of symbols and a formula identical with those of stimulus-response theory. In my opinion the psychological S-R stimulus response theory has its analogue in the sociological S-R (or state-rate) theory. Both suffer seriously from failure to utilize an explicit theory of the human personality and its general and specific properties as an intervening variable between their respective S,s and R,s. Introducing this personality factor (P) permits several important reformulations of the model

of analysis, involving rearrangements of the same basic elements according to the focus of the study...»³

This anomie theory tends to take insufficient account of the position that the process of definition intervenes between the stimulus, in this case the state of anomie, and the response or rate. In other words it seems that «... anomie refers to a property of a social system, not the state of mind of this or that individual within the system...»⁴ Anomie thus, it may be viewed as a condition of social surroundings and not a condition of particular people. Merton, in fact, explicitly incorporates the process of interaction in later formulations of this theory of anomie. He stresses that «the deviant behaviour consequently affects not only the individuals who first engage in it, but in some measure it also affects other individuals with whom they are interrelated in the system.»⁵ Indeed, Merton may be correct in stating that Cloward's paper in «Illegitimate Means, Anomie and Deviant Behaviour,»⁶ signals a new phase in the developing concept of Anomie.⁷ We assume that Cloward attempts to consolidate the anomie tradition and the differential association tradition. The principle of differential association from which Sutherland's theory can be derived is vital to the development of a more complete explanation of human conduct. According to Cloward's theory «Illegitimate Means, Anomie and Deviant Behaviour,» a very important question comes out; what are the opportunities for achieving success in the criminal world? If we can ask how opportunities for success by legitimate means are distributed throughout the social structure, does it not make sense to ask the same question about illegitimate means? Generally speaking, if we want to have any clear predictions about the probable rates of crimes in different social levels, we need to know what access these various levels provide their occupants for both legitimate and illegitimate opportunities.⁸ In other words, we have in front of us the theory of deviant means as a continuation of Merton's theory of anomie and deviant behaviour.⁹

3. Inkeles, Alex, «Personality and Social Structure,» in *Sociology Today* (Merton, Broom and Cottrell, eds.), New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1959, Vol. II, p. 255.

4. Merton, Robert K., «Anomie and Deviant Behaviour» in *Anomie and Deviant Behaviour* (Cloward Marshall) New York, The Free Press, 1964, p. 255.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

6. Cloward, Richard A., «Illegitimate Means, Anomie and Deviant Behaviour.» Reprinted in *Varieties of Modern Social Theory* by Rutenbeck, New York, Hendrik M. E. Dutton & Co., 1963, p. 402, 404.

7. Merton, *Op. cit.*, p. 216.

8. Becker, Howard, ed., *Social Problems: A Modern Approach*, New York, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1966, p. 223.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

1. White, Leslie A., *The Science of Culture*. New York, McGraw Press, 1949, pp. 144, 186.

2. Martindale, Don, *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory*. Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1960, pp. 86-89.

Cloward with Ohlin can go further than Merton's thoughts on anomie and deviant behaviour, in combining the psychogenetic with the sociogenic interpretation of the delinquent subcultures. According to them, like the more psychogenic interpretations, delinquent subcultures are seen as solution to different problems. In psychogenic tradition these problems are mental stress, anxiety etc. In the sociogenic traditions they are solutions to problems of status and position in society. In our tradition they make an individual form, and in the other, a collective form. In other words, in a particular deregulation of the social-moral order, they provide the two main corresponding interpretations. The psychogenic factors and the sociogenic factors.¹

If we go back to Durkheim's thoughts on social deregulation, we think that he looks at the society in terms of a dynamic equilibrium. The anomie state results from the occurrence of rapid change which has brought about the disintegration of the social bonds. «...Our faith has been troubled; tradition has lost its way; individual judgment has been freed from collective judgment; but on the other hand, the functions which have been disrupted in the course of the upheaval have not had the time to adjust themselves to one another; the new life which has emerged so suddenly has not been able to be completely organized...»² Durkheim does not limit himself to pure statistical normality, but believes that a phenomenon may be normal in appearance only.³ If the conditions that accounted for the development of a particular structure do not continue to exist, the continued existence, generality or universality, of the phenomena is pathological. This emphasis on function implies its opposite dysfunction and what appears functional to one observer may seem dysfunctional to another and vice versa. Related to Durkheim's equilibrium model is his characterization of the state of anomie, we are told that it is a state of normlessness, a disturbance of the collective order and all regulation is lacking for a time. We may observe the use of the following synonymous: dissociated, deregulation, rareness, etc. The state of anomie necessitates a serious readjustment in the social order. This characterization leads itself to an acceptance of social disorganization as an absence of norms rather than a conflict of norms. The focus seems that it is on the norms of the «total society.»

Merton represents a significant extension of anomie theory by the emphasis on situation which exhibits opposing norms such as are goals-means rather than no norms.

In his study on «Social structure and Anomie» he proposes as attempt to analyse the social and cultural sources of deviant behaviour. He tries to examine the manner in which the social structure presses certain persons in society and makes them to have nonconformist rather than conformist behaviour. According to him social and cultural structures define certain goals and objectives as legitimate. In addition, they determine and regulate acceptable modes of reaching these goals, without a corresponding emphasis on institutionalized means. When the process reaches its extreme form, demoralization or a state of anomie develops. However, «there is unusual emphasis on success goals without emphasis on the means and the situation undergoes change, then we have the state of anomie.»⁴

If we want to make a comparison between Durkheim's and Merton's conception of anomie, we can say that Merton's anomie is a condition in which a society lacks norms to regulate means; Durkheim's anomie is a condition in which a society lacks norms to regulate goals. Besides, Merton appears to be able to concentrate on the social order as a structure inducing status needs, without positing a «Freudian» war between biological impulses and social constraint.

With the development of the theory of anomie, we note that those who have extended Durkheim's original notion, have departed explicitly from original blueprint for a «pure» non psychological or anti-reductionist analysis in which Durkheim seems to have attempted to demonstrate that «rates»: could not be explained by psychology. This is otherwise, the crucial point of Durkheim's concept of anomie.

Deepdown, the concept of anomie does not seem that it is only a quality of the social system. It is also a quality of the individual. We may visualise it in Srole's scale.⁵ Srole explicitly says that anomie or anomia is viewed as having its origin in the complex of interaction of social and personality factors and that the condition is regarded as dependent on both sociological as well as psychological processes. In other words, it seems that much of the confusion surrounding the concept anomie, has centered around disagreement concerning

1. Becker, Howard S., ed., *ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

2. Durkheim, Emile, *The Division of Labour in Society*, New York, The Free Press, paperback, 1963, pp. 402, 409.

3. Durkheim, Emile, *The Rules of Sociological Method*. New York, The Free Press, paperback, 1938, p. 62.

4. Martindale, Don, *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

5. Srole, Leo, «Social Integration and Certain Corollaries; an Explanatory Study,» *American Sociological Review*, 21, pp. 709-716.

whether anomie is a societal condition, an individual condition or both.

Most writers agree that Durkheim and Merton intended the term to refer only to a societal condition.¹ But most of them agree, also, that Durkheim's and Merton's theories cannot be tested without postulating some resulting condition of behaviour.² Especially Merton in his paper «Social Structure and Anomie,» describes the adaptation of observed behaviour that may occur where the disciplining effect of collective standards has been weakened.

A good deal of research has resulted from the orientation, defining the postulating intervening variable as individual «anomia»,³ «alienation»,⁴ «meaninglessness»,⁵ and «powerlessness»,⁶ among others.

Consequently social theorists have still come to doubt whether anomie is a condition of individual, of collectivities, or both. McCloskey and Schaar contend that to Durkheim, anomie meant a condition of deregulation or relative normlessness in a social group when emphasis is supplied. Yet they make use of the term exclusively in a psychological sense.⁷

According to Isabel Cary-Lundberg, «anomie may be defined as a state of disorder, disruption in social collectivities»⁸ and Edwin Powell asserts anomie in «both social condition and a psychic state».⁹

personal aspects

Having in mind the subject of this paper, we attempted to provide certain social scientists' opinion about the sociological as well as the psychological aspects of anomie situation. First of all, in our opinion, the controversy over whether anomie is a condition of an individual or society misses the point of the term «social». It assumes that something which is social cannot be dealt with in

terms of individuals, and that individual phenomena cannot be dealt with on a social or societal level of analysis. Individual human beings and the collectivities of which they are a part cannot be separated analytically or otherwise. Therefore it seems that society and culture exist only within human beings, and an organism cannot be termed a «human being» without reference to a society. «Social phenomena» then, are what one studies when he studies the behaviour of individuals.

In Jean Duvignaud's analysis of Durkheim's work the parallel existence or rather the co-existence of the psychological along with the sociological aspects of the anomie situation or the normlessness, it might be considered as a revisional approach on Durkheim's apparent aspect of anomie.

In the paragraph which refers to the nature of the social facts, Duvignaud refreshes Durkheim's thoughts about the nature of the social fact(s), in considering it not as a material thing or fact but something else which appears proceeding from the external world of the society to the internal world of the individual.¹⁰ Duvignaud, in his analysis on Durkheim's thought on the nature of social facts, does not ignore that the «...ideas of ethics, the ideas of moral world of the society must derived from the observable manifestation of the rules that are functioning under our eyes, rules that reproduce them in systematic form, and that, consequently these rules and not our ideas of them, has to be taken actually the subject matter of science...».¹¹

It is thus assumed that Durkheim from the practical point of view, considers social phenomena in themselves as distinct from the representations of them in mind, primarily to make observer to study them objectively as external things, for it is this character that they present to us. Social facts are considering as things. In this particular point seeking to clarify the socio-individual, psychological elements of the anomie situation, the following remark based on Duvignaud's analysis may be made. Definitely, we can see the strong emphasis that Durkheim gives to the sociological elements of the anomie situation as well as the superiority of the social solidarity. But at any rate essentially does not ignore the individual psychological factor of the anomie situation considering suicide as one of the most important consequence of it. On the contrary he does accept it. This position he comes is his crucial point. But being obliged for

1. Powell, Edwin, «Occupation, Status, and Suicide: Toward a Redefinition of Anomie,» *American Sociological Review*, 21: 132.

2. Seeman, Melvin, «On the Meaning of Alienation,» *A.S.R.*, 24: 787.

3. Srole, *Ibid.*

4. Nettler, Gwynn, «A Measure of Alienation,» *A.S.R.*, 22: 672.

5. Powell, E., *Ibid.*

6. Clark, John P., «Measuring Alienation within a Social System,» *A.S.R.*, 24: 849-852.

7. McCloskey, Herbert and Schaar, John, «Psychological Dimensions of Anomie,» *American Sociological Review*, 20: 15.

8. Cary-Lundberg, Isabel, «On Durkheim's Suicide and Anomie,» *A.S.R.*, 24: 251.

9. Powell, E., *Ibid.*, op. cit., 23: 132.

10. Duvignaud, Jean, *Durkheim—sa vie, son œuvre* (avec un exposé de la philosophie). Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1965, pp. 86-90.

11. Durkheim, Emile, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, New York, The Free Press, 1966, pp. 23, 34.

the sake of solidarity of the society, he looks at the anomic and the suicide as a phenomenon which can be observed objectively with the same way as the social facts are observed. He has to make this externalization of the non material things (social facts) as we have already it primarily to make them understandable by any observer who is dealing with the social phenomena like the anomic situation.

Therefore the ideal, the moral, the ethical, is externalized in the society, because society is a totality of the individual human beings which are part of this collectivity. Society and culture exist within human beings and cannot be separated. Social phenomena are human phenomena.

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