

# Moral Anomie From Émile Durkheim's Point of View

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Durkheim's focus is the moral crisis. He believed that the main crisis of societies in the transition period is the moral crisis. According to Durkheim, the problem of societies is "consensus" and the loss of "moral authority". In his works, Durkheim has tried to analyze such a crisis, identify its causes and factors, and make a way forward for these societies. Therefore, the present research has examined Durkheim's view on moral anomie.

**Material and Methods:** The present study is a review. The researcher has examined the works of Emile Durkheim as well as articles related to the keywords of the present study that were published in Google Scholar, Science Direct, Springer, Emerald and SAGE Journals from 2000 to 2023.

**Conclusion:** From Durkheim's point of view, religion and tradition were the origin and basis of social cohesion and moral order in the past. But due to the variety of knowledge sources, development of scientific ideas, division of labor, social differentiation, rationalism and individualism, the religious foundations of such moral beliefs have become weak and shaky and cannot fulfill their cohesive and disciplinary role. For this reason, he is trying to establish a new ethics inspired by scientific knowledge. This new ethics is rooted in sociology and humanitarian and altruistic ideas. Durkheim believes that the only way to overcome the moral crisis in society is to develop civil ethics. Voluntary membership of people in social groups and professional and civil associations causes commitment and adherence to ethical rules.

**Keywords:** *Anomie, Ethics, Durkheim*

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## INTRODUCTION

Durkheim considers society as a "moral society" and considers the basic element of social order to be a set of moral rules and norms [1]. Durkheim considers the main subject of sociology to be the investigation of "moral facts" [2]. Based on such an approach, ethics in the Durkheimian tradition of sociology is "adherence and commitment to a set of authoritative, desirable, conscious and coherent common rules that accept systematic and predictable actions and actions in the direction of social good [3]." The components

and elements of this definition of ethics can be specified as follows:

1. Common rules: the role of these rules is to regulate social actions in such a way that by specifying mutual expectations, it makes actions predictable. Moral rules have two basic characteristics: authority and desirability. Authority; the sanctity of moral rules gives them a kind of authority and power of influence, in such a way that activists feel duty and obligation towards them and consider themselves obliged to follow them.

Desirability; moral rules are our desire and interest because we consider them desirable and pleasant. But this interest is not utilitarian or hedonistic, but rather comes from the attraction of these rules.

2. Coherence of the sector: moral rules are the factor of connection and connection of the individual with the group, community and society, and they strengthen the sense of belonging and commitment of the individual towards the community, and avoid the individual's self-centeredness, selfishness and rebelliousness towards the community.
3. Knowledge and choice: moral rules must be accepted and followed based on knowledge and choice, conscientiously and internally. In such a way that people feel that complying with these rules is always the most beneficial for the individual and the society [3].

According to this definition, theoretical rules and practical commitment form two dimensions of social ethics. The theoretical rules are rooted in the cultural system. The cultural system provides values, ideals, goals, rules and general and comprehensive criteria to the actors and gives direction to their actions and behaviors. Commitment and practical adherence to these theoretical rules is a product of the social system. The interactions and mutual actions of people and the membership of activists in groups and collectives and playing roles in different situations binds and obliges them to comply with ethical and normative rules as methods and ways of realizing goals and ideals [4]. With such a definition and understanding of the dimensions and characteristics of social ethics, "moral crisis" is placed right at its opposite point. The strength and sustainability of ethics and commitment to moral rules is as long as there is consensus and consensus regarding their desirability, legitimacy, authority, cohesion and free and conscious choice. But in the absence of such a consensus, the moral rules will be repeatedly violated and the

society will suffer anomie or a moral crisis. Durkheim believes that commitment and adherence to the rules and belief in their legitimacy and desirability are two basic elements of morality that are severely damaged in the situation of anomie.

Moral crisis involves disorder and disruption in both theoretical rules and social mechanisms of creating commitment and practical adherence to these rules of common order. In the situation of moral crisis, consensus and unanimity regarding the desirability, non-conflict and comprehensiveness of moral rules, as well as their legitimacy, efficiency and path-breaking in social life are highly doubted. In such a situation, there is no common rule and guide that guides people's actions in different situations in a regular and predictable way and in the direction of social good. Therefore, activists face a kind of disorder, disorder, conflict, confusion and uncertainty. And in the conditions of lack of common rules or doubt and hesitation towards them, they will act based on selfish desires, prefer individual interests over social good, and turn their backs on social expectations and responsibilities. For this reason, their interactions and mutual actions are minimized and they refuse to participate in ceremonies, rites and collective activities and membership in associations and civil groups, which results in a lack of commitment and adherence to moral rules and values.

According to what was mentioned, the present research has examined Durkheim's view on moral anomie.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study is a review. The researcher has examined the works of Emile Durkheim as well as articles related to the keywords of the present study that were published in Google Scholar, Science Direct, Springer, Emerald and SAGE Journals from 2000 to 2023.

## DISCUSSION

### **Anomie from Durkheim's point of view**

In his works, Durkheim refers to anomie with different concepts and words, such as abnormality, disorganization, evil, disorder, disorder, disorder, chaos and anarchy, distress, chaos, etc. But the only clear synonym he used for anomie is the French word *Deregulation*, which means "corruption and moral deviation" [5]. In other cases, he introduces anomie as a "moral disease" "anti-ethics" contradictory to any ethics and the opposite of moral health [6]. According to Durkheim, morality is nothing but commitment (that is, a sense of responsibility, duty, and commitment to rules) and utility [that is, a sense of value, usefulness, and usefulness of rules], and both of these are damaged in anomie [5]. For this reason, he states that anomie is a state in which the social rules [norms] are not binding for the actors, and following them is not beneficial for them [5].

In this definition, Durkheim clearly emphasizes the non-binding and "weakness of norms" in monitoring the roles and behaviors of people in society, in other words, anomie for Durkheim is not anomalousness, the absence and void of rules, but "normative weakness". According to his belief, no society can reach the state of complete abnormality and even warns that complete abnormality means dissatisfaction with all moral rules, hatred of the whole system and means insulting ethics and sanctities. And so it happens less often and we are only facing an increase in the rate of abnormality in society [5].

According to Durkheim, anomie is contradictory to any kind of ethics, and it is an anti-ethical concept and synonymous with moral corruption. The inverse relationship between anomie and ethics in Durkheim's thought comes from the fact that he considers ethics and the observance of moral values to be the basis and origin of social order. And anomie, which means weakness, inefficiency, void and suspension of rules or

irregularity, is exactly the opposite of ethics, for this reason Durkheim considers anomie to be the opposite of moral health and a kind of moral disease [7]. Based on this, Durkheim talks about two types of economic and family anomie: from his point of view, economic relations and relations apart from adherence to common moral rules are the source of corruption, crisis and disorder. From this point of view, economic anomie indicates the collapse of the framework of accepted values that limits and defines expectations in the field of economic business. "In a state of moral confusion, avarice far outstrips achievement, and because there are no checks to restrain it, it may become more widespread. Because nothing gives satisfaction and all restlessness remains unbridled and unappeased. This situation is like a race for an unattainable goal that has no happy outcome except the race itself [8]. But family anomie is related to marital and family relationships, husband and wife and family do not fit within the defined framework and uncontrollable emotions are released. Because this framework no longer responds to intensified feelings and emotions and expanded desires, it must be torn, broken and collapsed. Durkheim says that divorce is a powerful consequence of this type of anomie. But Durkheim does not limit anomie to these two types and believes that the moral crisis and anomie will quickly affect and destroy other areas of social life as well [8].

From this point of view, the effects and consequences of moral crisis and anomie from Durkheim's point of view at the macro level of society include; Weakening of social solidarity and group ties, ignoring mutual social obligations, contradiction, conflict, strife and social conflict, disorder, instability and weakness of rules and laws and lawlessness and public dissatisfaction.

Based on Durkheim's methodological emphasis, anomie is a social problem and a characteristic of

a situation and a society, not an individual. For this reason, the differentiation of anomie into individual and social does not seem justified and acceptable from his point of view. Such a situation is a social reality outside the individual that somehow imposes itself on people, although the effects and manifestations of this situation can be seen in people's behavior. The effects and consequences of anomie at the micro and individual level include excessiveness and selfishness, indecision and confusion, cut off from society, social isolation, despair and hopelessness, aimlessness and lack of motivation, and turning to false and illegal jobs and finally divorce, suicide, etc.

### **Moral anomie**

One of Durkheim's attention issues is the moral crisis. He considers the main crisis of societies in the transition period to be a moral crisis. According to Durkheim, the problem of these societies is not economy but "consensus" and the loss of "moral authority". From Durkheim's point of view, religion and tradition were the origin and basis of social cohesion and moral order in the past. But due to the variety of knowledge sources, development of scientific ideas, division of labor, social differentiation, rationalism and individualism, the religious foundations of such moral beliefs have become weak and shaky, and the other cannot play its cohesive and disciplinary role.

In Durkheim's opinion, in the period of transition of societies, with rapid economic-social changes and developments, the desirability and legitimacy of moral values and norms are questioned and shaken. The levers of cohesion and order become ineffective and various crises and conflicts are formed, which can be classified into three main forms:

- Economic crises caused by industrial conflicts along with changes in wealth and economic-

social structures, which will lead to instability in the old system and social chaos.

- Racial divisions and unnatural classifications where people from lower classes rebel against tyrannical restrictions.
- Lack of coordination among different professions, which causes the collapse of social cohesion.

These social changes make the society severely unbalanced, social disorganization and weakening of moral norms [9]. Durkheim emphasizes "when society is torn apart by painful crises or rapid transition and transformation, there is no preparation for moral influence [10]. From Durkheim's point of view, in a state of moral chaos, the desire for excess exceeds the achievements too much, and because there is no control to restrain it, it may become more widespread. Because nothing gives satisfaction and all restlessness remains unbridled and unappeased. This situation is like a race for an unattainable goal that has no happy outcome except the race itself. But at the same time, this struggle continues with more violence and hardship because it is "intense competition" and "weak control". How can the desire to live not weaken and suicide not increase in such a situation where efforts have little result? [11]

### **Moral anomic causes**

Durkheim considers rapid economic-social changes and developments that break or severely weaken traditional moral standards and rules and deny the possibility of adaptation and coordination of people of social groups and classes to new conditions as the main bed and ground of moral crisis. He considers the starting point of such confusion and disarray in the economic field and professional life, but he believes that this moral confusion will quickly spread to other sectors and areas of society [12]. On the other hand, Durkheim believes that moral confusion is not limited to acute crisis periods

and has become a chronic condition in social life. In his opinion, the entry of societies into the world of industry in the 20th century has freed human relations from the supervision of the moral order of traditional society. So that the traditional society has been invaded by the forces of modern disintegration, simple societies are disintegrating, and with the increase and density of the population, social life becomes complicated. Communication changes from dealing with the familiar to dealing with the stranger, and most importantly, common religious beliefs and customs, which cause social cohesion, are being degraded and weakened, and with the reduction of religious restrictions, the state of abnormality is accelerated [13].

In his various works, Durkheim has dealt with the causes and factors of moral crisis in a more specific and detailed way.

In the book *Division of Social Labor* [14], Durkheim emphasizes the social cohesion between groups or organs, and in the book *Suicide* [15] on the cohesion of the individual and family, religious and political communities. He believes that social cohesion and order should be considered in the form of division of labor, strengthening of collective conscience, the presence of civil institutions and the production of civil ethics for internal control and the strengthening of law for external control [16]. From this point of view, Durkheim emphasizes the role of social incoherence in the creation of moral crisis at the level of structural analysis. According to Durkheim, cohesion has two fundamental elements: social support and social control. Social support provides social bonding through which people are tied to common social goals. Social support also enables the constant exchange of ideas and feelings between people and acts as a two-way moral support.

Durkheim's theory of suicide emphasizes the consequences of social incoherence from such a perspective. Based on this theory, high cohesion

and strong social ties foster common social values and to the extent that society regulates the desires of a person, it also determines the meaning of his life [10]. And on the contrary, cutting social ties and support leads to isolation and depression of a person and the meaninglessness of his life, which ultimately leads to suicide.

The other dimension of cohesion means order and social control by using external and legal levers to control unlimited wishes and desires, profiteering and individual ambitions for social good [3]. For this reason, along with civil ethics for conscientious and internal control, Durkheim emphasizes strengthening and consolidating the law and government for external control and preventing the violation of social rules and norms.

Another cause of moral crisis from Durkheim's point of view is individualism. He makes a distinction between two types of individualism: first, extreme individualism is reprehensible, which in his opinion is equivalent to selfishness and the result of a person breaking away from social bonds and the source of evil. The second type of individualism is caused by the division of labor, which is not only condemned, but praised, and Durkheim refers to it as "the cult of the individual" [2]. In selfish individualism, people's commitment to the rules and norms of society is weakened. According to Durkheim, selfish individualism is the source of moral crisis because it means preferring individual and group interests over social interests. In this type of individualism, since people seek to satisfy their insatiable desires and lusts as much as possible, there is no commitment to moral rules - which can limit this "desire to infinity" and "insatiable lusts".

Another cause of moral crisis from Durkheim's point of view is injustice. He believes that in order for people to behave ethically in society, the "existence" of rules is not enough, but the rules must be correct and fair [11]. Therefore,

Durkheim emphasizes justice instead of emphasizing (only) normative agreement [14]. It is justice that holds the new society together and not the conformity of norms, because in the new moral relations there is a kind of contract between the individual and the society. The society has the task of cultivating collective individualism and the individual has the task to limit his selfish "will". The central issue of the social division of labor is indeed justice, not merely social order: Durkheim believes that "the task of the most advanced societies is to promote justice" [5]. Therefore, according to him, the duty of the government is not (only) to establish social order in the aforementioned sense, but also to establish and maintain justice. Because according to Durkheim "... the state is the civil organ of justice..." [3]. Durkheim's theory about religion leads us to another cause of moral crisis. Durkheim believes that the collective conscience plays an important role in creating social order and what undermines the legitimacy of the social order is the gap between the values supported by the government and the values demanded by the collective conscience. Therefore, the greater the intensity of moral and religious beliefs in the society, the greater the possibility of achieving a stable social order [12]. From this point of view, one of the causes considered by Durkheim in explaining the moral crisis is the weakening of religious beliefs. According to Durkheim, in the course of social segregation and division of labor, the collective [religious] conscience and common beliefs are weakened, and as a result, religious ethics or ethics inspired by religion are also weakened.

Durkheim's ritual theory in the book "Primitive Forms of Religious Life" shows another aspect of the weakening of religious tendencies in the moral crisis. From Durkheim's point of view, performing rituals is a way to ensure social solidarity and integration of individuals in groups.

Religious rituals, especially through two disciplinary and cohesive functions, prevent the growth of selfishness and moral crisis in societies; On the one hand, people join social groups through religious rites, and on the other hand, religious practices contribute to rule-making and social order by transferring moral rules and internalizing them in people.

In summing up the factors and conditions of moral crisis in transitioning societies, from Durkheim's point of view, 5 factors can be identified and separated:

- 1- Changes in living standards (expansion and lifestyle change).
- 2- Exposure of moral norms and rules to continuous changes (shaking of rules and norms).
- 3- Freedom and liberation of various activities from order and rule (disorder and chaos and weakness of order and social control).
- 4- Weakening the moral forces of society (weakening religious beliefs).
- 5- Reducing social ties and interactions (individualism and lack of social cohesion).
- 6- Unfair rules and lack of fair and equal access to valuable social resources (social injustice and feelings of discrimination)

Each of these factors or a combination of them in proportion to the intensity and weakness of their presence in a society can lead to a level of crisis or moral turmoil in a society. But the combination and sum of all these crisis-causing factors can be seen in societies in transition, which are plagued by chronic instability, continuous, rapid and endless changes. The longer the period of transition of societies and the more resistant and tougher the mental and objective obstacles of passing from the traditional and pre-modern period are, the longer the period of chaos and moral crisis of societies will be.

## CONCLUSION

The moral crisis and anomie in the transition



process of Western societies to the modern era at the beginning of the 19th century has led to the formation of three movements: Protestantism, reconstruction and reconstruction of religious thought, socialism and sociology. Protestantism is a reaction to the weakening of religious beliefs and the incompatibility of traditional religion with the requirements of modern industrial society and an effort to revive the role of religion in life and the new society. Socialism is a reaction to the incompatibility of the old moral and political powers with the nature of the new industrial society, as well as social problems such as inequality, discrimination, and poverty, which are generally rooted in excessive individualism, cold and profit-seeking relationships, and a lack of responsibility towards society. But sociology is a symbol of the scientific spirit that inevitably leads us to the scientific study of social phenomena [13]. From such a point of view, common moral beliefs as a guide for social actions and behavior are necessary for the consistency of society and social cohesion, as Kent also emphasizes. In the new society, with the weakening of religion and its orderly role, the traditional moral beliefs have also become very weak and discredited, and sociology tries to propose an alternative type of scientific ethics that fits the requirements of the new society, inspired by the new scientific spirit [13]. For this reason, thinkers like Durkheim consider sociology to be equivalent to ethics and consider it "the science of studying moral realities".

With an optimistic and hopeful view of modern society, Durkheim tries to create a new moral theory by combining modern moral values such as rationality, calculation, and individuality with altruism and emotionalism, which is the answer to the problems and problems caused by the lack of cohesion and disorder of the new society. Durkheim finds the root of such a crisis in the lack and weakness of common moral beliefs, which, according to Kent, has always been a

factor in the cohesion of societies since the dawn of history. From Durkheim's point of view, the origin and basis of such common beliefs was the integration of religion and tradition in the past. But due to the abundance of knowledge sources, the development of scientific thoughts, rationalism and individualism, the religious foundations of such moral beliefs have become weak and shaky and are no longer able to fulfill their disciplinary and cohesive role because of the past. For this reason, with the inspiration of the scientific knowledge of sociology, he is trying to establish the foundation of a new ethics that fits the requirements of the new society. But Durkheim does not search for such ethics in metaphysical, abstract, philosophical and abstract thoughts, nor in physical, naturalistic, individualistic and utilitarian thought, but in sociology. In Durkheim's civil ethics and moral sociology, characteristics such as authority, desirability, sectoral coherence, freedom, and awareness are combined.

In this attempt, Durkheim considers both the individual and the society, and for this reason, he calls his theory moral individualism. He emphasizes both reason and emotion, as well as the coherence and internalization of moral values through the educational system and civil and trade unions, as well as external order and control by law and regulatory and judicial institutions. Durkheim tries to create a kind of balance between the elements and components of ethics so that through a new interpretation of traditional elements and reconciling them with rationality and modern values, he can solve the lack of coherence and moral disorder that is the problem of the transitioning societies. From this point of view, he believes that the only way to overcome the problem of incoherence and moral crisis in modern society is to strengthen civil ethics. From Durkheim's point of view, the necessity of such a new moral system is the transition of societies from mechanical and

similar solidarity to organic solidarity and differentiation and division of labor and social segregation, which connects people with each other due to need. On the other hand, from Durkheim's point of view, membership in social groups and civic and professional associations consolidates commitment and adherence to such a new ethical system. According to him, such social groups are compatible with the characteristics of modern societies because people join them with personal desire and voluntarily, and on the other hand, they have such authority and dignity with each individual that they are able to give moral discipline to their behavior internally. . Durkheim believes that with the consolidation, strengthening and authority of civil ethics and modern values, weak relations and social cohesion, selfish individualism and profit seeking will be moderated. And it will give its place to the commitment and sense of responsibility towards the society and social welfare and benefits, and after that social solidarity and cohesion will be formed at a higher level. In such an order, the rights of all citizens are respected regardless of racial, cultural, religious and political affiliations. Inequality, discrimination and suspicion, pessimism and mistrust are taking over the society. Citizens look at everyone equally and equally, what they don't like about themselves, they don't like about others, they love everyone and do good deeds.

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues [such as plagiarism, conscious satisfaction, misleading, making and or forging data, publishing or sending to two places, redundancy and etc.] have been fully considered by the writers.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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