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A DISSECTION OF DURKHEIMIAN LITERATURE: ANOMIE, DEVIANCE AND SUICIDE

Ishaan Deepak Joshi¹

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research paper is to contribute a scholarly addition to the ongoing academic discourse on the conventional understanding of anomie. Specifically, it aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of the term of anomie as conceptualised by Émile Durkheim. A comprehensive examination of Durkheimian Literature was conducted in order to achieve the present objective. The contention may be made that the notion of anomie exhibits several meanings throughout Durkheim's corpus of scholarship. As a result, it is imperative to do a comprehensive inquiry into the significance of this notion inside every empirical study, accompanied by a precise explication of its meaning. This method enables researchers to effectively harness its potential while comprehending its scientific constraints.

KEYWORDS

Anomie, Suicide, Division of Labor, Social Structures, Value Systems, Egoism, Fatalism, Ethics, Deviance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The French sociologist Émile Durkheim is widely recognized as the one who introduced the notion of anomie to the field of Sociology through his seminal works, *De la Division du Travail Social* from 1893 as well as *Le Suicide* from 1897.² Subsequently, the notion of anomie has acquired substantial prominence within the field of Sociology. The concept of

¹ NALSAR University of Law and MIT-WPU Faculty of Law.

² Mestrovic SG, Lorenzo R. Durkheim's concept of anomie and the abuse at Abu Ghraib. *Journal of Classical Sociology*. 2008;8(2):179–207

anomie has been associated with several meanings, while its etymological definition denotes the lack of standards, rules, or laws.

The term of anomie encompasses several ramifications. Thucydides, a prominent writer during the era of Classical Antiquity, alluded to the concept of anomie, denoting a state characterised by the absence of legal order, disregard for religious principles, and the lack of established society norms. Thucydides employed this notion to portray the devastating plague that afflicted Athens during the period of 4 years from 430 BCE.

Furthermore, the matter not only has significant implications for individuals' well-being but also presents a substantial ethical dilemma. The term *Nosos*, derived from the Greek language, refers to the concept of disease. It possesses the capacity to have adverse effects not only on the physical health of individuals but also on the overall health of communities, their structures, and their cultural heritage.³ Dementia can be classified as a *nosos*, which is a term used in medical discourse to refer to a pathological condition or disease.

An epidemic encompasses both the adverse consequences and the associated distress caused by the spread of infectious diseases, as well as the disruptive turmoil resulting from the collapse of governmental structures, social structures, and shared perspectives. Anomie is a state that emerges when there is a lack of convergence or reciprocity of functions due to economic crises, conflicts involving capital and labour, or the specialized nature of scientific disciplines. This is a state characterised by excessive spending, absence of societal norms, and societal disarray, alongside the absence of legal frameworks or regulations that control the functioning of a society.

When examined within the framework established by Durkheim, the idea

³ Bygnes S. Are they leaving because of the crisis? The sociological significance of anomie as a motivation for migration. *Sociology*. 2016;51(2):258–273

of anomie could be perceived as possessing ambiguity and, to a certain degree, inconsistency when considering the entirety of his written works.⁴ The primary objective of this research paper is to offer a scholarly addition to the discourse around the traditional notion of anomie, having a specific focus on elucidating the intricate significance attributed to it by Émile Durkheim.

II. DISSECTION OF ANOMIE IN DE LA DIVISION DU TRAVAIL SOCIAL

Durkheim posits that individuals lack an inherent moral character. Nevertheless, the existence of individuals in a given community contributes to the establishment of moral principles, which are shaped by the cultivation of a collective identity within a group. It is important to note that the level of solidarity experienced by a group might differ. Durkheim's theoretical framework posits the existence of two distinct forms of social solidarity, each serving as mechanisms for fostering interpersonal connections among individuals. The concept of mechanical solidarity emphasises the notion of resemblance, which serves as a cohesive factor among members in a given group. This specific form of solidarity serves to enhance the internal cohesion of the group and foster a heightened recognition of its collective influence.⁵

Furthermore, it enforces stringent limitations on people by means of the pervasive implementation of authoritarian legal statutes. Conversely, organic solidarity is characterised by a distinct demarcation of roles and duties within the community, alongside a significant division of labour. Within this particular form of solidarity, the cohesion among people is derived from the mutual dependence between social functions, while the collective awareness is characterised by its weak and diffuse nature, spanning across several groups. In the presence of organic solidarity, the principle of restitution assumes primacy. The rationale for the legislation

⁴ Boudon R. Anomie. Newyork: Encyclopædia Universalis; 2018. 7 p.

⁵ Boudon R, Besnard P, Cherkaoui M, et al. Dictionary of Sociology. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote; 1990. 477

in the context of organic solidarity lies in its aim to reinstate disturbed order, rather than only focusing on the punitive aspect of addressing criminal behaviour. Furthermore, the management of social life is influenced by morality, which is facilitated by the engagement of social and cultural elements.⁶ Cultural factors encompass cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects, and all of these are transmitted and disseminated through the mechanisms of socialisation.

Emile Durkheim, in his seminal work titled "De la Division du Travail Social," conducts a comprehensive examination of the pathological dimensions associated with the division of labour, specifically focusing on the division of anomic labour. The author argues that the increase in the distribution of labour in intricate communities may be linked to a combination of factors, including population growth, closer proximity of society members in physical settings, improved communication, and heightened mutual dependence between people throughout the social realm. The increasing stratification of work within contemporary society has played a significant role in the growing prominence of the concept of organic solidarity.

As individuals increasingly specialise in their occupational pursuits, their reliance on the collective community for their sustenance also intensifies. Simultaneously, the endeavours of individuals become ever more focused and specialist. As a result, our society has experienced significant and rapid changes in its essential structure. Nevertheless, the moral standards and beliefs that align with this particular social archetype have seen a decline, resulting in a void within our shared consciousness that remains inadequately filled by an alternative conceptual framework.⁷ The absence of a satisfactory alternative framework remains unaddressed, as the hole in question has not been fully filled.

⁶ Javeau C. Lições de Sociologia. Oeiras: Celta Editora; 1988. 25 p

⁷ Kamensky EG, Boev EI. An innovation civilization in the context of the anthroposphere crisis of the technogenic society. Asian Social Science. 2015;11(4):1-8

There has been a notable decline in the confidence placed in religious beliefs, resulting in a diminished influence of traditional norms and an increased emphasis on individual judgement separate from collective judgement. Conversely, the functions that experienced disconnection due to the calamity were incapable to effectively adapt and synchronise with each other. The sudden emergence of new life exhibited a lack of adequate organisation and, more importantly, did not satisfy the deeply ingrained desire for justice that resonated within our collective consciousness.

The emergence of new life has evoked a profound need for fairness inside us. The allocation of jobs and obligations to various people within a community has the potential to foster a feeling of camaraderie and mutual dependence amongst its constituents. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the allocation of tasks can sometimes lead to disparate consequences. It is important to bear in mind this key aspect. Hence, the attempt to specialise in intellectual pursuits results in scientists encountering isolation rather than fostering a sense of camaraderie with like-minded others who possess common interests. An additional facet associated with the anomic distribution of labour arises as a direct consequence of the advancement of economic activity.⁸

The advancement of production and the expansion of markets possess the capacity to hinder the progress of economic harmonisation. The objective of production has transitioned from fulfilling visible demands, as was historically the case, to prioritising the optimisation of industrial output. The progression of these occurrences will ultimately give birth to crises that will exert a substantial impact on the economy and incite societal conflicts.

The problems at hand may be attributed to two fundamental factors.

⁸ Abrahamson M. Sudden wealth, gratification and attainment: Durkheim's anomie of affluence reconsidered. *American Sociological Review*. 1980;45(1):49–57

Firstly, the limitation of employees to particular and specialist tasks, and secondly, the diminishing level of interaction among individuals involved in the process of production due to the allocation of labour⁹. Both of these issues have a role in the restriction of employees.

Durkheim posits in his seminal work, "De la Division du Travail Social," that anomie is a detrimental phenomenon primarily attributable to its adverse impact on societal dynamics. One of the primary arguments put out by Durkheim is the following. In accordance with his theoretical framework, the prosperity of a society is contingent upon the maintenance of a sense of coherence and regularity. Consequently, the presence of anomie poses a significant obstacle to the general health of society as a whole. According to Durkheim, the shift from the conventional system to the modern order necessitates the establishment of cooperation and societal cohesiveness in order to uphold social order.

According to Paiva's scholarly analysis, the following interpretation is based on Durkheim's views. The achievement of this objective can be attained through fostering social cohesion, wherein individuals within a community abide by and uphold a collection of ethical principles that are widely acknowledged and esteemed by the remainder of the community.¹⁰ The concept of anomie emerges as a pathological manifestation of the division of labour, as elucidated by Durkheim in his seminal work "De la Division du Travail Social," within the framework of diminished social control and coherence. This phenomenon might be attributed to the presence of anomie, which arises as a consequence of the segregation of work.

Within the context of this discourse, the concept of anomie pertains to a state characterised by a temporary deficiency in societal regulation,

⁹ Choi YH, Myung JK, Kim JD. The effect of employees' perceptions of CSR activities on employee deviance: The mediating role of anomie. *Sustainability*. 2018;10(3):601–602

¹⁰ Durkheim E. *Sociological theories. The founders and the classics*, volume I. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian; 1989. 64 p

hence hindering the establishment of collaborative connections among specialist tasks. The observed phenomenon can be attributed to the lack of interaction between individuals occupying distinct social roles. Hence, the phenomenon of anomie arises within the context of the social division of labour, whereby collaboration is supplanted by conflict and rivalry, and the collective objectives and shared aims embraced by individuals progressively shift towards individualization.

This is the manner in which anomie arises within the context of the societal segregation of labour. The phenomenon of individuals personalising their aims and desires is a major element that contributes to conflicts. The idea of anomie may be employed to describe individuals as well as the societies in which they reside.¹¹ The concept of anomic distribution of labour refers to a state in which individuals deviate from the norms and regulations set out by the collective norms of society.

Nevertheless, this proposition also implies that societies are structured in a manner that hinders their capacity to enforce limitations on individuals, hence impeding the cultivation and maintenance of social unity. This is indicated by the manner in which societies are structured. One plausible explanation for the phenomenon of the individuality of goals and principles is that it arises as an inexorable outcome of the societal structure and organisation.

III. SUICIDE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DURKHEIM'S ANOMIE THEORY

Durkheim posits that the concept of anomie, in relation to the separation of work, has two distinct elements, being anomie and egoism. These principles were identified by the renowned sociologist Emile Durkheim. An individual characterised as egoistic is one who, instead of relying on external ethical standards, establishes their own set of behavioural and

¹¹ Segre S. A Durkheimian theory of social movements. *International Journal of Social Science Studies*. 2016;4(10): 1–19

lifestyle principles based on their own values, rather than seeking advice from others in these domains. The egoistic individual places emphasis on ideals that are limited to their own distinct mentality, whilst the non-egoistic person is dedicated to values that transcend their own identity.¹²

Discovering a sense of purpose in life might pose challenges for those characterised by egocentric inclinations and a perception of inadequate communal support. These folks have supplementary challenges in this attempt. Anomie refers to a social state characterised by the absence or weakening of society norms and constraints, enabling individuals to exercise their personal interests and desires without being constrained by conventional social expectations. The current situation with social circumstances is occasionally denoted as anomie. Durkheim's work encompasses the conceptualization of suicide as involving all instances of death that can be attributed to deliberate actions or inactions by individuals, demonstrating a comprehensive awareness of the anticipated outcome.¹³ He articulates this by asserting that suicide comprises all occurrences of mortality that may be ascribed to self-inflicted death.

Durkheim proposes a methodological framework that involves classifying suicides based on their underlying causes, as opposed to a simplistic category based solely on the characteristics previously stated in this paragraph. Consequently, the author differentiates between many types of suicide, encompassing self-centred, altruistic, fatalistic and anomic acts of suicide. The concept of individualism, which exhibits a probable correlation with suicide by egoism and has the potential to contribute to the deterioration of social bonds, is posited as a potential determinant in the act of self-inflicted mortality.¹⁴ Individuals often

¹² Heydari A, Teymoori A, Mohamadi B, et al. The effect of socioeconomic status and anomie on illegal behavior. *Asian Social Science*. 2013;9(2):1– 7. 8.

¹³ Oliveira A. *Ilusões na idade das emoções–Representações sociais da morte, do suicídio e da música na adolescência*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian and Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia; 2008. 80 p

¹⁴ Dohrenwend BP. Egoism, altruism, anomie, and fatalism: A conceptual analysis of Durkheim's types. *American Sociological Review*. 1959;24(4):466–473

experience a profound sense of isolation and grapple with considerable difficulty in discerning the true meaning or purpose of their existence. The existence of a pervasive community awareness has the potential to lead to the subjugation of one's own interests, so diminishing the inherent value of each person and perhaps culminating in self-destructive altruism.

The sociological concept of anomic suicide is associated with circumstances characterised by a decline in societal regulation over individuals' aspirations. There exists an inverse relationship between individuals' susceptibility to collective sentiments and principles, and their inclination to express their ambitions openly and experience dissatisfaction due to the incongruity between their aspirations and the strategies they employ to attain them. The presence of an abundance of limits might potentially be linked to fatalist natured suicide, because people may see this as a dearth of independent agency and autonomy in shaping their own life and anticipating future outcomes.¹⁵ This phenomenon may engender a sense of powerlessness in individuals, as they perceive a lack of agency in determining the trajectory of their life.

Paiva argues that anomic suicide, initially conceptualised by Durkheim, arises as a consequence of insufficient or diminished social norms. It typically occurs as a result of a relaxation of society norms, a decline in religious participation, or societal unrest stemming from rapid normative shifts, such as those experienced during periods of social turmoil, uprisings or severe recessions.¹⁶ Durkheim's analysis of suicide focuses on anomic suicide, which occurs within a social context characterised by persons experiencing a lack of insight concerning opportunities and restrictions, justice and injustice, as well as actual wants and the related

¹⁵ Aron R. Émile Durkheim, the stages of sociological thinking. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote.1994. 328 p

¹⁶ 5. Paiva A. Durkheim. Sociological thought. A didactic introduction to classical theories. Lisboa: PACTOR–Edições de Ciências Sociais, Forenses e da Educação; 2014. 371 p

means of achieving them. In the present setting, anomic suicide may be perceived as a manifestation of communal suicide.

Hence, each phenomenon possesses an inherent rationale. Anomic suicide is observed in environments characterised by persistent interpersonal competition, individuals harbouring lofty aspirations for their existence, and a substantial yearning for fulfilment in their lives. As a direct outcome of this phenomenon, individuals come to realise that they are consistently plagued by the distress stemming from the substantial disparity between the level of satisfaction they attain and the aspirations they have. The persistent sentiment of perpetual irritation and disgust is closely linked to the countless occurrences of disappointment that are inherent in modern existence, together with a keen awareness of the disparity between one's aspirations and the level of satisfaction actually attained.

The concept of anomie is closely associated with instances of suicide. The text delineates a societal context whereby individuals possess the capacity to openly articulate their desires without being constrained by regulatory frameworks. The aforementioned scenario highlights the boundless nature of human ambitions and the ambiguity surrounding the objectives that need to be pursued. These elements are deeply ingrained throughout the framework of values, organisations, and functioning of modern industrial society.¹⁷ The notion being referenced in this statement pertains to an alternative interpretation that deviates from the understanding of anomie as described in Émile Durkheim's seminal work, *De la Division du Travail Social*.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The article discusses Durkheim's perspective on the concept of anomie and highlights the lack of a universally uniform definition of the term

¹⁷ Hoffman MA, Bearman PS. Bringing anomie back in: Exceptional events and excess suicide. *Sociological Science*. 2015;2(1):186–210

across his many research publications. However, considering a broader pedagogical context, it is reasonable to strive for an integration in order to formulate a more comprehensive definition. Lorenzo along with Ten Houten as well as Mestrovic assert that Durkheim unequivocally establishes a correlation between the term *dérèglement* and the idea of anomie. Anomie, in this context, is a state characterised by the absence of norms or a lack of control. Durkheim posits that the reduction of anomie might be achieved by a greater emphasis on the function of trade or professions in fostering effective social integration.¹⁸

This approach would effectively accomplish the intended outcome of mitigating anomie. Within the realm of sociological inquiry, the notion of anomie possesses the capacity to serve as a valuable heuristic device, contingent upon its delineation in a suitable way and explication that is unequivocally apparent. However, similar to any other scientific hypothesis, this line of reasoning may be subjected to testing and is susceptible to critical examination.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ten Houten WD. Normlessness, anomie, and the emotions. *Sociological Forum*. 2016;31(2):465–486

¹⁹ Choi YH, Myung JK, Kim JD. The effect of employees' perceptions of CSR activities on employee deviance: The mediating role of anomie. *Sustainability*. 2018;10(3):601–602