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Anomia and Sin in Durkheim's Thought*

STJEPAN G. MESTROVIĆ†

The received view of anomie as normlessness is reviewed and found to be unsubstantiated theoretically and problematic empirically. The classical meanings of anomia as sin are reviewed in the works of Lyonnet and Sabourin, Hertz, Guyau, Lalande and others. This classical notion of anomie is then traced through Durkheim's writings.

In 1887, Guyau published a work on religion in which he advocated "anomie" as a rational alternative to dogmatism. Lalande ([1926] 1976: 61) believes that Guyau coined the term to designate "le nom d'anomie pour l'opposer à l'autonomie des Kantiens" (Kant's "autonomy," with its heavy sense of duty was indeed repressive). Durkheim reviewed Guyau's book that same year (in Pickering, 1975: 24-38) and expressed no problem with Guyau's definition of anomie, only with his treatment of individualism as a correlate of anomie. Orru (1983) thinks that Durkheim actually learned of the concept of anomie from Guyau, which would be difficult to prove, given Durkheim's rabbinical background, but is correct that Durkheim knew of it long before his *Division of Labor* (1893).

A superficial glance at the word "anomie" and its derivatives (anomia, anomy) has been sufficient to convince a generation of scholars that it is derived from "a-nomos," lack of law. But Lyonnet and Sabourin (1970: 42-43), in their analysis of the Biblical use of anomy as sin, challenge the belief that "anomia really means what etymology, a-nomos, would suggest: 'lawlessness,' disobedience to, disrespect for the law." They note that "nowhere in the New Testament is anomia related to nomos, 'law.'" Guyau and Durkheim were aware of this, and referred to "rule," not law, in their discussions of anomy. Thus Guyau ([1887] 1962: 374) claimed that "what we have called moral anomy" is "the absence of any fixed moral rule." Durkheim used this classical notion of anomy as "lack of rule" in *Division of Labor* ([1893] 1933: 431), *Suicide* ([1897] 1951: 257), *Socialism and Saint-Simon* ([1896] 1958: 240) and elsewhere.

Lalande ([1926] 1976: 906-907) warns that Durkheim's use of "règle" should not be confounded with the "vulgar" meanings of "law" or "norm" sometimes attached to it. "Règle" was used in the 19th century in the classical Greek sense of a formula which prescribes the existence of a phenomenon. Indeed, Robert Hertz (1922), one of Durkheim's most brilliant disciples, treated "sin" as "anomia," that is, as an attack on a moral order that does not necessarily imply the accomplishment of an act, and that is radically different from crime. Nielsen (1983) has explored the anomia-sin connection with regard to the

**I would like to acknowledge the influence of Donald A. Nielsen's unpublished paper (on Hertz's treatment of sin) which he presented at the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar at Duke University in 1983, and to express gratitude to Professor Edward A. Tiryakian and the other Fellows for the discussion that ensued. I am also grateful to Professor H  l  ne M. Brown for her assistance with the translation of French version of texts by Durkheim and members of his School.*

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implicit or explicit themes found in the works of Hertz and a host of other thinkers, among them Fauconnet, Freud, Glotz, Guilluy, Halbwachs, Hubert, and Mauss, and found that all of them distinguished sharply among various kinds of normative infractions.

In light of the obvious importance of the fact that what has for centuries been known as "sin" had been translated for centuries as "anomia," it is surprising that no attempt has been made to explore this connection. In this paper, I hope to scratch the surface of this problem with regard to Durkheim's concept of anomy. I will show that the received views of anomy as normlessness, normative breakdown and the like are not supported by Durkheim's thought. Second, I will point to the coincidence of Lyonett & Sabourin's and Hertz's understanding of sin as an attack on the sacred moral order that does not necessarily require behavior, and isolate the paths in Durkheim's thought that lead to the same conclusion. Finally, Durkheim's works will be reviewed and verbatim quotes will be used to demonstrate that he used anomy as the secular equivalent of sin, as an inversion of the sacred and profane. I leave open the question of the degree to which Durkheim was self-conscious about the identification of anomie with sin.

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF ANOMY

Discussions concerning Durkheim's concept of anomy, in general, and especially with regard to religion, tend to be murky. The received view is that anomy is a state of "normlessness" or "deregulation" that is generally harmful. As Wallwork (1972: 49) put it: "Anomie or normlessness, as the term itself implies, is due to insufficient normative control whereas fatalistic suicide is the result of excessive group surveillance and lack of individuation." La Capra (1972: 159) defines anomie as "a state of complete normlessness and meaninglessness of experience attendant upon institutional and moral breakdown." Dohrenwend (1959: 472) also refers to the "absence of norms altogether" in anomie. Some theorists have noted that there cannot be a *total* lack of norms if one is going to speak of society, so they refer to anomie not as normlessness but as "one of multiple, contradictory normative standards with which the actor must contend" (Dudley, 1978: 107; see also Marks, 1972; Willis, 1982). Merton's (1957: 131-160) goals-means schema of anomie also falls under this latter rubric though it rests on his assertion that "as initially developed by Durkheim, the concept of anomie referred to a condition of relative normlessness in a society or group" (161). Merton's view, of course, is but an echo of the definition of anomie put forth by Parsons (1937: 377): "Anomie is precisely this state of disorganization where the hold of norms over individual conduct has broken down." According to Parsons, "the breakdown of this [normative] control is anomie or the war of all against all" (407). Giddens (1976) has already shown that this Parsonian view is completely unsubstantiated by Durkheim's writings.

Not one of the above mentioned theorists quotes Durkheim to support the claim that anomy is normlessness. It is impossible to find such support because Durkheim never said anything like it. The view that anomy is normlessness suffers from the same over-socialized conception of persons that dominates other aspects of social theory today, even though it has been criticized many times on other grounds (Wrong, 1961; Mills, 1959; Dahrendorf, 1958; Lukes, 1972; Giddens, 1976).

A second approach to anomy has been to suppose that persons are not uni-dimensional,

at the mercy of collective control (as the above view implies) but that they are dualistic. Thus Lukes (1972: 22) regards this dualistic vision of human nature as "the keystone of Durkheim's entire system of thought." From this point of view, anomy is perceived to be a conflict between social and individual aspects of existence, between society's obligations, frameworks, and goals and the individual's autonomy (23-24). Lukes does not develop this view because he thinks Durkheim contradicted himself in that he advocated individualism at times (with his emphasis on the cult of the individual) while at other times he treated individualism as a synonym for utilitarian egotism, which he regarded with contempt. Giddens (1972: 15-16) arrives at a similar criticism of Durkheim in his discussion of anomy.

But this problem is rather easily resolved. In *Suicide*, for example, Durkheim writes that "man has become a god for men" but that "this cult of man is something, accordingly, very different from the egoistic individualism . . . which leads to suicide" ([1897] 1951: 336). This is because "the cult of man" is a *collective* representation, and is not derived from the individual (see especially Durkheim [1912] 1971: 271-2; [1893] 1933: 407, 1898a). According to Durkheim, humanity in the abstract has become the new secular religion in modern times, but "the religion of the individual was socially instituted, as were all known religions" ([1898a] 1973: 54). The germ of this idea was already present in Durkheim's mind in 1887 when he reported on his study with Wundt and reviewed Guyau. All three thinkers (and others in their milieu as well) claimed that religion was being replaced by a cult of the individual in the abstract, or humanity. As Durkheim put it ([1900b] 1958: 69): "It is not this or that individual the *State* seeks to develop, it is the individual *in genere*, who is not to be confused with any single one of us" and "this cult, moreover, has all that is required to take the place of the religious cults of former times." So there is no need for Lukes and Giddens to regard Durkheim's thoughts on individualism as contradictory to his emphasis on the supremacy of the social.

The third pattern in discussing anomy is to focus on Durkheim's claim that "suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual forms a part" ([1897] 1951: 209). This claim obviously contradicts his converse claim in *Suicide*, that "insufficient individuation has the same effects" so that suicide occurs "when social integration is too strong" (217). Many sociologists have noted the sheer inelegance (from their point of view) of claiming that too much *and* too little integration is pathogenic. So, Maris (1969: 12-13) concludes that Durkheim made a mistake:

The suicide rate cannot vary indirectly *and* directly with social integration at the same time. Being a great man, Durkheim realized this and put his comments on fatalism in a footnote, apparently hoping that his rather obvious contradiction would be overlooked.

"Integration" is another murky concept in sociology, treated as a state of society, of individuals, and of the "attachment" of individuals to society (Douglas, 1967: 39). Whatever it is, integration allegedly creates normative consensus, order and the *opposite* of anomy (Parsons, 1937: 377, 389). So, parts of Durkheim's thought have been amputated in order to make it fit the expectation that too much anomy (in terms of "integration" and/or "regulation") is harmful. Thus, one finds Barclay Johnson (1967: 875) claiming that altruism and fatalism "really do not belong" in Durkheim's scheme, and that Durkheim "really" posited one cause of suicide:

A closer look at *Suicide* suggests, however, that altruism and fatalism really do not belong in Durkheim's scheme, and that egoism and anomie are identical. Thus, his four causes of suicide can be reduced to one, so that all variation in suicide rates is attributed to a single cause.

Whitney Pope (1976: 46) agrees with Johnson, pointing out that if egoism and anomie are the same, then Durkheim's inverse law remains intact. How is this different from simply ignoring half of *Suicide* (the part pertaining to altruism and the centrifugal part of human nature)? In any case, Pope's "solution" is to say that egoism-anomie are related inversely with "integration," and that altruism-fatalism are related proportionately with regulation so that when integration and regulation are high, anomy is low (57). The problem with this solution is that Durkheim never said anything like it.

Powell (1958: 133) also reduces all of Durkheim's types to anomy. Similarly, Gibbs and Martin (1964: 7) reduce anomy to integration: "Nearly all the properties Durkheim ascribes to anomie can be subsumed under the concept of social integration." At first, Gibbs and Martin (1958) chose to emphasize only Durkheim's inverse law, asserting that his comments on altruism and egoism "present us with three theories rather than one" (1964: 5). For them, "integration" refers to the strength of the individual's ties to society (Gibbs & Martin, 1958: 148). Gibbs and Martin have been criticized so many times for this misinterpretation of Durkheim (Douglas, 1967; Chambliss & Steel, 1966; Hagerdon & Labovitz, 1966; Li, 1970; Atkinson, 1979, Schalkwyk *et al.*, 1979) that probably in response to these critiques, Gibbs (1982) now claims that the theory of status integration is only *inspired* by Durkheim but "does not purport to be a rendition of Durkheim" (Gibbs, 1982: 228) and that the tests of his theory have thus far been incomplete. That is how the matter stands at present, with no real breakthrough in understanding how one should operationalize Durkheim's claims that too much *and* too little integration is suicidogenetic.

This approach to anomie does violence to Durkheim's thought and is unfair to the scientific community because of what it discards. There is no good reason for scientists to obscure something for the sake of superficial elegance. Consider Durkheim's treatment of the sexes in relation to suicide. He writes that "suicide happens to be an essentially male phenomenon" (Durkheim, [1897] 1951: 72) and,

If women kill themselves much less often than men, it is because they are much less involved than men in collective existence; thus they feel its influence — good or evil — less strongly (298).

Durkheim had made a similar claim several years earlier in *The Division of Labor*: "Woman has had less part than man in the movement of civilization. She participates less and derives less profit . . . thus, there is about one fourth the suicides among women as among men" ([1893] 1933: 246-247). If suicide were only inversely related to integration, and if integration implied social ties, as Gibbs and Martin, Pope, and others claim, then one would have to conclude that Durkheim made some colossal errors in logic above. But if integration is a state of society, not individuals, and if too much and too little integration is pathogenic, then his arguments make sense: Women are shielded from the malintegration of society by participating in it less than men. (For a full discussion of this, refer to Mestrovic & Glassner, 1983.)

In Chapter 1 of *Suicide*, Durkheim rules out the possibility that psychopathic states are related to suicide. While the full extent of his argument will not be reviewed here, it is clear that part of it is that neurotics withdraw from social life (in the language of

Gibbs & Martin, they are not “integrated”) but do not succumb to suicide for this reason, and in fact, perform a useful social function because of their neuroses. Consider his claim concerning “neurasthenics:”

If in fact, as we have shown, neurasthenia may predispose to suicide, it has no such necessary result. To be sure, the neurasthenic is almost inevitably destined to suffer if he is thrust overmuch into active life; but it is not impossible for him to withdraw from it in order to lead a more contemplative existence . . . he is superlatively the instrument of progress. Precisely because he rebels against tradition and the yoke of custom, he is a highly fertile source of innovation (Durkheim, [1897] 1951: 76).

Similarly, when he considers the relationship of suicide to cosmic factors, such as temperature and the seasons of the year, Durkheim again concludes that too many “social ties” are related to suicide. For example, “The day favors suicide because this is the time of most active existence, when human relations cross and recross, when social life is most intense’ (117). Similarly, more suicides occur in the warm months of the year than in winter because “the mere lengthening of the days seems to offer wider latitude to collective life” (119) so that “In August when everything begins to settle down, suicides diminish” (120) and “if voluntary deaths increase from January to July, it is not because heat disturbs the organism but because social life is more intense” (122).

This much is clear. Whether one wants to consider integration as social ties or a state of society, in Durkheim’s view, *too much* of it can be pathogenic. One cannot simply ignore this for the sake of superficial elegance.

Finally, an approach to anomy is found whereby it is treated as a feeling of “meaninglessness” on the psychological level. This is what Srole’s anomia scale tries to capture, according to Merton (1957: 164-166). La Capra (1972: 160) also refers to the “psychological expression of anomie” in the individual as the expression of anxiety and frustration. There are many problems with this received and not sufficiently examined view beside the fact that it misrepresents Durkheim’s position. First, Srole’s anomia scale consistently correlates with low social status such that the *lower* the person’s occupational prestige, level of education, and income, the *higher* such persons score on anomia. But in Durkheim’s classic study, anomy was *not* associated with lower social class; rather, it was associated with what we would consider to be indicators of high social standing, namely, being male, Protestant, well educated, literate, and urban, indeed, with civilization and its attendant progress. Dodder and Astle (1980: 334) are correct that rather than regard the Srole anomia scale as a measure of anomy, one ought to regard it as a measure of “a general dimension of despair,” or at least a qualitatively different form of unhappiness than that which afflicts the upper strata of society.

Furthermore, the relationship of anomy to religion has been found to be inconclusive and contradictory, as Hong (1981: 239) indicates in his review:

. . . there seems to be a paradox in our findings: on one hand, we find religious affiliation and strength of religious identification having no significant effect on anomia, but, on the other hand, we find the frequency of attending religious services a significant factor.

Consider that in terms of affiliation and identification, Americans, across all social classes, are among the most religious people on earth, but that when it comes to religious attendance, women and minorities are far more religious than white males. But women

and minorities also score *higher* on Srole's anomia scale than white males. And, women and minorities have *lower* suicide rates than men and whites. If anomie is supposed to be related proportionately to suicide, why is this obvious contradiction tolerated? Durkheim felt that women were protected from anomie precisely because they participated less in society than men.

Schoenfeld (1982: 13) used the National Opinion Research Center General Social Surveys to find that "the frequency of participation in no way predicts the level of anomie [measured by Srole's scale] in a population" and that this is true "regardless of type of association and the size of the community in which it occurs." So much for the expectation that "social ties" will lower anomie.

Again, there is no good reason, with regard to Durkheim, to expect that the individual will be able to feel anomic. Like his contemporaries, Durkheim made extensive use of the concept of the unconscious (Mestrovic, 1984). He accepted without question that psychic phenomena occur within us even though we do not apprehend them (1898b), that we are subject to illusion when we try to determine the reasons for our acts ([1897] 1951: 43) and that in general, "social life must be explained not by the conception of it formed by those who participate in it, but by the profound causes which escape their consciousness" (in Lukes, 1982: 171).

In general, none of the received views of anomie prevalent in the literature use Durkheimian texts to support the view that anomie is normlessness or meaninglessness, though they attribute these meanings to him.¹ And Durkheim never referred to anything like "social ties" as the opposite of anomie in his discussion of "integration," but to the "intensity of collective life," vitality, unity, and strength ([1897] 1951: 159, 170, 201-2), which is how "integration" was used by Spencer and others in that milieu (Lalande, [1926] 1976: 521).

ANOMIA AND SIN: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

The view to be put forth in this essay is that Durkheim used the concept of anomie as the secular counterpart of sin, which is to say, as an incorrect arrangement of individual and collective representations, as the treatment of the sacred as if it were profane, and vice versa. Key terms in this characterization, among them "représentation," "conscience," and "sacré," almost defy translation. They are explained by the Durkheimians and other philosophers in Lalande's *Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de la Philosophie* (1926), which has yet to be referenced by Durkheimian scholars. A full discussion of these terms is beyond the scope of this essay (refer to Mestrovic, 1985). Nevertheless, they must at least be summarized for the unfamiliar reader.

The French word "représentation" literally means "idea," but for the Durkheimians, it implies a tension between something actually present to the senses and its replacement in the mind of the observer as an image (Lalande, [1926] 1976: 920-2). It was also of crucial importance in the writings of Descartes, Hegel, Kant, Malebranche, Renouvier, Herbart,

1. One sociological voice in all this contemporary wilderness had caught the correct spirit of Durkheim's writings, though it is almost never referenced. Riesman (1961: 242) was correct to claim that Durkheim used anomie as meaning "ruleless, ungoverned" which does not just mean "maladjusted" because the anomies may be "those who are overadjusted, who listen too assiduously to the signals from within or without" (244).

Wundt, Bergson, Schopenhauer and a host of others in Durkheim's milieu. In this context, Durkheim praised Saint-Simon as the rightful founder of sociology because he was the first to claim that society is a system of ideas ([1896] 1958: 104). In *The Rules*, Durkheim ([1895] 1982: 34) claimed that he "had expressly stated and reiterated in every way possible that social life was made up entirely of representations" (see also Durkheim, [1912] 1971: 231; [1900b] 1973: 13-14; [1897] 1951: 312; [1902-3] 1961: 277; [1898] 1974: xxxvii; [1902-3] 1958: 71-2). Representations are neither ideas nor material stuff, neither autonomous nor epiphenomena of their substrata. They are something unfamiliar in the context of present day social science and philosophy. Durkheim advocated a new epistemology he called "renovated rationalism" as a way to study these phenomena, which is *not* like positivism, realism, or rationalism (Durkheim, 1983; [1895] 1982: 33; [1912] 1971: 19; [1913-14] 1960: 386, 412, Besnard, 1983: 140; Bouglé, 1938). In describing renovated rationalism, his disciple Bouglé (1938: 22) emphasized that Durkheim "did not tend to a materialistic outlook, but strove to remain faithful to the spirit of rationalism," but "a rationalism impregnated with positivism" such that he was "positive in spirit, but no slave of the positivist system."

This focus on representational life has at least two major consequences for this discussion. One is that norms are *not* equivalent to all collective representations. For Durkheim, a part of society is always invisible so that offenses against it are something other than normative transgression. The other is that because representations are not material "stuff," one does not have to "do something" to violate them. They can be violated by a wrong attitude or "spirit," even when one follows the letter of the law. Theology has been well aware of this in its concern with the problem of evil, but sociology has not.

The term "conscience collective" definitely includes the unconscious for Durkheim such that if "there is a collective conscience, then conscious facts must be included and explained as well as unconscious facts" (Durkheim, 1908: 238; for a full discussion, refer to Mestrovic, 1984). But as Lalande ([1926] 1976: 41-3, 173-6, 300-1) observes, Durkheim used the term "conscience collective" more like soul ("âme") or spirit ("esprit") than the Anglo-Saxon "consciousness." Indeed, Bouglé (1938: 19) suggested that "conscience collective" may be thought of as "the distant descendant of *Volksgeist*, if not of the 'objective spirit' of Hegel." Durkheim distinguished between the "conscience collective" and "conscience sociale" in a crucial passage in *The Division of Labor* ([1893] 1933: 79-81)² and therefore between social facts *by* society versus social facts *in* society, ([1898] 1974: 26-32; see also Durkheim, [1895] 1966: li, 6; 1908: 235; 1900c). Durkheim thought it was obvious that "of course, everything in society is not social" ([1900c] 1981: 1056), and Filloux (1970: 48-52), Leroux, Fauconnet (in Lalande, 1976: 147-148) and his other disciples made much of these distinctions.

2. In Lalande ([1926] 1976: 147) Leroux writes: "*Conscience* semble signifier ici simplement 'siège de phénomènes psychiques' (peut-être inconscients); c'est comme un synonyme positiviste d'*âme*. Noter encore que Durkheim a établi une distinction entre *conscience collective* et *conscience sociale*: v. *Division du Travail*, 2^e éd., p. 46." In the English edition, Durkheim ([1893] 1933: 80) indeed writes: "As the terms, collective and social, are often considered synonymous, one is inclined to believe that the collective conscience is the total social conscience, that is, extend it to include more than the psychic life of society, although, particularly in advanced societies, it is a very restricted part. . . . To avoid the confusion into which some have fallen, the best way would be to create a technical expression especially to designate the totality of social similitudes . . . we shall employ the well-worn expression, collective or common conscience, but we shall always mean the strict sense in which we have taken it."

The importance of this distinction is that an offense against the “conscience collective” is not the same as an offense against the “conscience sociale.” The former is crime, and the latter is sin. Because of the unconscious, one does not have to be fully aware of one’s intentions in either case to be culpable.

Durkheim explained the sacred in Lalande ([1926] 1976: 937) as that which is separated from the rest, inviolable, literally, that which may not be touched, “taboo” (see also Durkheim, [1898] 1974: 70-1). The profane, by contrast, is open and accessible to all, vulgar and pedestrian. The essence of religion for him is, as he takes pains to make clear in *The Forms* (1912) and its sequel (1914), the division of everything into the dualism sacred-profane: “We have religion as soon as the sacred is distinguished from the profane” (Durkheim, [1912] 1971: 182). Durkheim had actually foreshadowed this move as early as 1887 and 1899 (in Pickering, 1975: 24-38, 74-99). The consequence of this move is that religion is always a *social* phenomenon for Durkheim (in contradistinction to magic, as noted by O’Keefe, 1982: 10-14) and that individualism, as a social phenomenon, is the essence of the religion of the future: “This religion of humanity has everything it needs to speak to its faithful in a no less imperative tone than the religions it replaces” (Durkheim, [1898b] 1973: 48). In this way, Durkheim overcame the problem posed by Guyau in 1887, that anomie is associated with individualism in opposition to religion, and is therefore beneficial. For Durkheim, anomy is an attack *on* individualism, which is a social phenomenon that partakes of the sacred.

Not everything collective is considered by Durkheim to be social (discussed fully in Mestrovic, 1982: 31-2, 117-127). Thus, he claimed that “The society that morality bids us desire is not the society as it *appears* to itself, but the society as it is or is really becoming” (Durkheim, [1898b] 1974: 38). Even then, the morality that crime offends (the “conscience collective”) is fundamentally different from the morality offended by anomy (the “conscience sociale”). The reader may verify this by referring to Durkheim’s treatment of crime in *The Rules*, *Suicide*, and *The Division of Labor*.³ For example, in *The Rules*, crime is depicted as an offense against “certain collective feelings,” and the “common” conscience, and “sentiments still keenly felt in the average consciousness,” but nothing like the “conscience sociale” ([1895] 1982: 99, 102).

Once these fine distinctions in Durkheimian terminology are appreciated, one is in a position to understand Durkheim’s use of anomy in the context of the historical meanings of “anomia,” as opposed to the vulgar meanings of “lawlessness” or “normlessness” attached to it today. To conceive of anomy as the mere transgression of norms is as naive and insipid as conceiving of sin as the mere breaking of religious prescriptions. In fact, as Lyonett and Sabourin (1970) point out, the early Christian fathers referred to what we now call “sin” as “anomia.” Anomia corresponds to 24 Hebrew words in the Old and New Testaments. Not one of these meanings refers to the mere breaking of God’s

3. Of course, in *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim ([1893] 1933: 92) claims that “in primitive societies, criminal law is religious law, [and] we can be sure that the interests it serves are social” and that this is because “offenses against the gods are offenses against society” (93). In other words, in undeveloped societies, crimes are essentially sins, and require expiation (100). All punishment has an element of expiation, but only because collective sentiments “represent” society (101). Note that in this discussion Durkheim moves from a discussion of “conscience collective” to “conscience sociale” as he moves from crime proper to religious crime. This same problem in distinguishing the “social” from the “collective” is encountered in *The Forms* to a high degree, especially in the concluding remarks ([1912] 1971: 418-22) and in the opening chapters of *Professional Ethics* (1900). Compare with Spencer (1967: 180-94) and his analysis of crime versus sin.

commandments. They imply, rather, that in sin "God in some way, at least in the intention of the sinner, is hit, grieved, and, as it were, hurt" (14). Sin is also conceived as a debt, a disease to be healed (26), "not as a specified sinful deed, but as a power which governs men and inspires their conduct" (27). Anomia, as sin, is therefore "the secret quality, the spirit, the tendency, which inspires the sinful actions and provokes them" (30). It is "a general state of hostility against God" (33). In the parable of the prodigal son, for example, the sin is *not* a visible, external transgression; "rather, the prodigal son has offended his father by refusing to be son, to receive, that is, everything from his father's love, by pretending to be his own master, like Adam in Eden" (37).

Therefore, "to commit sin is not only to make a bad action, it means to commit also 'iniquity,' to reveal, that is, the sinner in his innermost, as a son of the devil, as he who opposes God and Christ, as he who accepts Satan's rule" (43) so that "to sin is to follow one's fancy, unrestrained by the law of God" (43). Sin is therefore the "rejection of light, acceptance of darkness" and leads to death (43). Sin "is the inward dynamism of evil leading to and manifesting itself in sinful actions" so that "man cannot be liberated from the tyranny of sin except by receiving a new dynamism, the life-giving Spirit, who works in man his reunion with God" (291).

These deep meanings of anomia as sin could not have escaped Durkheim who was descended from a long line of rabbis and whose classical education could scarcely be excelled. It is as impossible to find Durkheim ever making the claim in any of his writings that anomy is normlessness or the breaking of norms as it is to find sin defined anywhere in the Bible as the mere transgression of divine law or the absence of such law. Rather, Durkheim seems to use "anomy" as the secular equivalent of "sin." It is, therefore, an inversion of the sacred and the profane, a domination not by the "devil" but by its secular equivalent, by what is personal, egoistic, materialistic, transitory, and sensual. The sacred, as he makes clear in "The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions" (1914), is comprised of conceptual thought, the impersonal, altruism, idealism, collective ideals and intellectual values. The profane is comprised of "the body," sensations, anything personal, egoism, and sensory appetites. Anomy as sin is the *condition* of rebelling against the sacred such that the profane is treated as if it was sacred, and vice versa.

This is certainly the path pursued by Durkheim's disciples. Hertz (1922), for example, regarded sin as a violation of an ideal moral order, but this violation consists of a *state* which predisposes the agent to renewed offenses. None of these offenses have to entail actual *behavior*, they are not the same as crime, and they do not have to be intentional. Rather, sin is essentially "une attitude perverse de la conscience intime" (Hertz, 1922: 54).⁴ He treats death as the collective representation of expiation for sin in this and an

4. Because Hertz's (1922) essay is virtually unknown to sociologists, I would like to refer in detail to portions that I think are significant. First, sin is *not* an act but a *state* (contemporary sociologists do not make this distinction with regard to "normlessness") such that "le péché consiste, non seulement dans une action transitoire, mais dans un état qui subsiste après que la cause initiale a disparu" (43). Second, the consequence for sin is unconsciously perceived by the agent to be condemnation that results in death (43-44). Third, "le péché attaque un ordre moral" which consists of "représentations d'ordre idéal" (46). Fourth, crime is fundamentally different from sin in many ways, chiefly in that sin produces an immediate effect on the individual regardless of society's response: "Le crime n'exerce pas, comme le péché une action profonde et immédiate sur l'état du transgressoir" (49). Finally, one does not have to *do* anything to commit a sin: "Et cette infraction ne réside pas essentiellement dans l'exécution d'un geste interdit: il suffit, pour qu'il y ait péché, d'une intention mauvaise et d'une rébellion purement subjective . . ." (51).

earlier essay (1907). Hubert and Mauss (1898, 1904) treat sin in this way in their essays on magic and sacrifice. Nielsen (1983) has shown how Fauconnet, Davy, Halbwachs and other Durkheimians applied this understanding of sin to their analyses of guilt, responsibility, and expiation. Apparently, this conceptualization of sin was pedestrian in Durkheim's milieu since one finds Parodi making the Durkheimian claim in Lalande's *Vocabulaire* ([1926] 1976: 748-9) that "péché" is neither crime nor lawbreaking, but is a perverse fancy, an evil attitude independent of the gravity of the act and its consequences, and constitutes a sickly, intimate, *secret* "morality."

Slavish obedience to the letter of the law is as sinful in Christian thought as open rebellion because both violate its spirit. Similarly, too much and too little conformity to society's surface norms (the "conscience collective") is regarded by Durkheim as anomic. The anomie-sin linkage may begin to explain some of the ambiguities faced by students of Durkheim.

DURKHEIM'S USE OF ANOMIA AS SECULAR SIN

Consider Durkheim's comments on anomie in book three and the second preface to *The Division of Labor*. He is concerned with anomie in government, economics, and science. If one considers, for brevity's sake, only his comments on science and anomy as illustration, it is obvious that he does not so much as breathe the notions of "normlessness" or "deregulation." Rather, he discusses the "concrete and living" part of science which "is even its best and largest part" because "otherwise, one will have the letter, but not the spirit" of science (Durkheim, [1893] 1933: 362). Durkheim is making a clear allusion to the Bible and is criticizing, in a direct and searing fashion, the tendency for scientists merely to follow a paradigm (the letter of the law). Scientists are in a state of anomy when they focus so exclusively on "some propositions which have been definitively proved" that they lose sight of the sacredness of their task. In a word, the anomic scientist works in the equivalent of a state of "sin," but this condition may be caused by following too closely the norms of one's profession.⁵

The over-socialized understanding of Durkheim just does not do justice to him. Elsewhere in *The Division of Labor* he states outright that "it is not sufficient that there be rules, however, for sometimes the rules themselves are the cause of evil" (374). Clearly, the frequently alleged "normative regulation" that is purported to be the obverse of anomie is regarded by Durkheim as one of its possible causes! What, then does Durkheim truly regard as necessary for the division of labor to function normally? He claims that what is needed above all is "justice" (388).

Durkheim's use of "justice" is akin, in many ways, to the classical notion of justice best illustrated by Plato. In the first place, it rests solidly on the concept of *homo duplex*, which is similar to Plato's division of the soul and universe into antagonistic parts. As

5. Consider Allcock's observation in this regard that what Durkheim "finds in pragmatism is no less than *intellectual anomie*, in that there is insufficient regulation of that which passes for truth in society. This point is the fulcrum of his entire discussion of pragmatism and incidentally it points the way to a reappraisal of the general drift of Durkheim's sociology" (in Durkheim, 1983: xxxvii). I agree, so long as one understands "regulation" in terms of "règle." See also Montgomery's (1984) fine discussion of scientific bias as "sin" in the context of Spencer's thought. The theme that scientific anomie is something other than "normlessness" or lack of consensus is a fruitful one that has deep *religious* roots in the West.

Durkheim puts it:

We are thus led to the recognition of a new reason why the division of labor is a source of social cohesion. It makes individuals solidary, as we have said before, not only because it limits the activity of each, but also because it increases it (395).

This is far from the contemporary implication that justice is the mere imposition of a normative structure. (Anyone familiar with the classics will note the affinity between the modern vision and the view of Thrasymachus in *The Republic*, which Socrates attacks.) The division of labor inhibits individuality at the same time that it makes it possible because of the proper balance of forces that comprise *homo duplex*. Durkheim reiterated this point eloquently in the *L'Année*: "The division of labor is the only process which allows us to reconcile the necessities of social cohesion with the principle of individualism" (Durkheim, [1904] 1980: 102). The anomic division of labor is also a "sinful" state in which these opposing forces are not in harmony, in which "justice" has not been achieved.

Durkheim seems to have been keenly aware of the implicit parallel between this conception of anomy as a replacement for sin and that of the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. *The Division of Labor* ends with the thought that "the collective conscience is becoming more of a cult of the individual" (407). According to Durkheim, it is Christianity, in contradistinction to Judaism and Greek religions, that essentially worships the individual:

By contrast, the Christian religion had its seat in man himself, in his very soul . . . to sum up, with Christianity the world loses its confused primitive unity and becomes divided into two parts, two halves, to which very different values are ascribed (Durkheim, [1904-1905] 1977: 283).

The reference to the "two halves" — an obvious Platonic reference — refers to *homo duplex* as the essence of Christianity. Durkheim reiterates this point many times, as in *Moral Education*, where he writes that Christianity is "an essentially human religion since its God dies for the salvation of humanity. Christianity teaches that the principal duty of man toward God is to love his neighbor" (Durkheim, [1902-1906] 1966: 6-7).

With this shift in focus in the object of worship there occurs a shift in the focus of sin. Sin in primitive religions was essentially a violation of specific rites and norms whereas in Christianity, according to Durkheim, "the place they [rites] occupy and the importance attributed to them continue to diminish" (7). Rather, in Christianity,

Essential sin is no longer detached from its human context. True sin now tends to merge with moral transgression. No doubt God continues to play an important part in morality. . . . But He is now reduced to the role of guardian. Moral discipline wasn't instituted for his benefit, but for the benefit of men (7).

This Durkheimian notion of "true sin" is similar not only to the interpretation of anomia as modern-day sin and to Christ's coming to fulfill Mosaic law, but also to Durkheim's general understanding of anomy. The mere breaking of rules is not sufficient for anomy because that would imply a very primitive morality. Anomy requires a veneration of the individual to such an extent that it is believed that the individual is capable of choosing a state of moral transgression.

Even Durkheim's famous discourse on anomy in Chapter 5 of *Suicide* does not refer

to “deregulation” as the absence of norms but as the absence of “justice” (Durkheim, [1897] 1951: 249). He illustrates this lack of justice with regard to economics, such that in trade and industry, anomy is “in a chronic state” (254) because both religion and government have become the “tool and servant” of business (255). This is the “injustice” of anomy, so similar to the iniquity of sin. Thus, Durkheim writes:

The longing for infinity is daily represented as a mark of moral distinction, whereas it can only appear within unregulated consciences which elevate to a rule the lack of rule from which they suffer. . . . Since this disorder is greatest in the economic world, it has most victims there (257).⁶

Can there be any doubt that Durkheim’s reference to a rule that is really the lack of rule means something other than “normlessness”? One has to strain language to an absurd degree to conceive of a norm of normlessness. But the rule of lacking rule is intelligible as a contemporary version of sin.

A section of *Suicide* is rarely discussed by scholars, the one pertaining to “conjugal anomy” (384-386). Had Durkheim truly possessed the strong normative streak often ascribed to him, surely he would have agreed that “the only way to reduce the number of suicides due to conjugal anomy is to make marriage more indissoluble” (384). But having offered stricter divorce laws as a “solution,” Durkheim proceeds to ask: “Must one of the sexes necessarily be sacrificed, and is the solution only to choose the lesser of two evils?” (384). He answers, no — “For man and woman to be equally protected by the same institution [marriage], they must first of all be creatures of the same nature” (386). The mere passage of laws to promote equality or make divorce difficult will only result in what he calls “juridical equality.” As in *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim calls for the “spirit of the law” and not just the letter of the law in *Suicide* as the solution to anomy.

In his neglected work, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, Durkheim continues the attacks on business that he began in *The Division of Labor* and *Suicide*. He makes the charge that in business, considered as a profession, “no professional ethics exist” (Durkheim, [1900] 1958: 9) and that both capitalism and socialism “do no more than raise a *de facto* state of affairs which is unhealthy, to the level of a *de jure* state of affairs” (10) because “it is not possible for a social function to exist without moral discipline” (11). According to Durkheim, “it is precisely due to this fact that the crisis has arisen from which the European societies are now suffering” (11). Even military, governmental and religious functions have been made subordinate to business. Thus, “this amoral

6. In French, this passage reads: “La passion de l’infini est journellement présentée comme une marque de distinction morale, alors, qu’elle ne peut se produire qu’au sein de consciences *dérégulées* et qui érigent en règle le *dérèglement* dont elles souffrent. . . . Et comme c’est dans le monde économique que ce désarroi est à son apogée, c’est là aussi qu’il fait le plus de victimes” (emphasis added). In general, Durkheim’s use of *dérèglement* as one synonym for anomie has been consistently mistranslated as “deregulation.” The English word “deregulation” did not come into usage until this century, and “*dérèglement*” is translated as disorder, irregularity, lack of coordination or derangement. Thus, Lalande (1976: 61) writes that one meaning of anomie is “absence d’organisation, de coordination. ‘L’état de *dérèglement* ou d’anomie . . .’ Durkheim, *Le Suicide*, p. 281.” The passage in *Suicide* to which Lalande refers has been mistranslated as “The state of de-regulation or anomy . . .” (Durkheim, 1951: 253). Similarly, Durkheim’s claim that “le *dérèglement* ne va pas sans un germe d’egoïsme . . .” has been mistranslated as “it is indeed almost inevitable that the egoist should have some tendency to non-regulation . . .” (325). The mistake of treating “*dérèglement*” as some form of de-regulation is not even subtle, but the effect is profound. The French meanings of “*dérèglement*” make the theological implications that it is a state of disarray, incorrect arrangement, even madness, but certainly nothing like deregulation or non-regulation.

character of economic life amounts to a public danger" and "the unleashing of economic interests has been accompanied by a debasing of public morality" (Durkheim, [1900] 1958: 12). It is obvious that he is not criticizing the business profession for any alleged lack of norms — unrestrained greed is a norm — but for holding the wrong kind of norms, for "sin."

Durkheim made the link between anomy and "infiniteness" in the context of capitalism most forcefully in an even more neglected work, *Socialism and Saint-Simon*, in 1896. He begins here with the claim that "However skillfully ordered, economic functions cannot co-operate harmoniously nor be maintained in a state of equilibrium unless subjected to moral forces which surpass, contain, and regulate them" (Durkheim, [1896] 1958: 197). He then adds that,

In fact it is a general law of all living things that needs and appetites are normal only on condition of being controlled. Unlimited need contradicts itself. For need is defined by the goal it aims at, and if unlimited has no goal — since there is no limit (197).

This is a far cry from Merton's use of "goals" and "means" with regard to anomy. Durkheim seems to rely on the classical notion of goals as "the Good" which "rational principles" must enable persons to attain. The goals must be sacred to begin with, and the means must be commensurate with them. Durkheim continues:

As there is nothing within an individual which constrains these appetites, they must surely be constrained by some force exterior to him, or else they would become insatiable — that is, morbid. . . . This is what seems to have escaped Saint-Simon. To him it appears that the way to realize social peace is to free economic appetites of all restraint on the one hand, and on the other to satisfy them by fulfilling them. But such an undertaking is contradictory (199).

The rest of chapter 6 of this book is detailed criticism of Saint-Simon, pursuing the theme that contrary to Saint-Simon, "the problem is to know, under the present conditions of social life, what moderating functions are necessary and what forces are capable of executing them."

In his conclusion, Durkheim accuses Saint-Simon of trying to get "the most from the least, the superior from the inferior, moral rule from economic matter" (240). In essence, Durkheim accuses Saint-Simon of advocating anomy!

Note that Durkheim is essentially objecting to the inversion of what has for centuries been considered an unbridgable gap between the sacred and profane as the essence of anomy. That is, the economic structure was always considered profane because it emphasized personal egoism and what is material. Society, on the other hand, was always considered sacred because it involved that which transcends personal egoism and is essentially spiritual, a system of ideas. Thus, according to Durkheim, "it could not be a question of building one to the other — still less of mingling them" so that "the very idea of such fusion was revolting — like sacrilege" (Durkheim, [1896] 1958: 41). Durkheim's repugnance at this treatment of money as something sacred when it is really profane is clearly expressed in the second preface to *The Division of Labor*, the conclusion of *Suicide*, and of course, the works on ethics and socialism already cited. Similarly, Marcel Mauss' thesis in *The Gift* is "that the whole field of industrial and commercial law is in conflict with morality" (Mauss, 1967: 64). He echoes Marx and Durkheim, when he claims that in losing the collective representation of gift-giving, man "became a machine — a calculating machine" (74).

I think that one of the most ponderable claims Durkheim makes in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* occurs immediately following the presentation of his thesis of *homo duplex*:

This duality of our nature has as its consequence in the practical order the irreducibility of a moral ideal to a utilitarian motive and in the order of thought, the irreducibility of reason to individual experience (Durkheim, [1912] 1971: 16).

The reduction of morality to utilitarianism and of rationalism to empiricism are, in fact, the two forms of anomy that concerned Durkheim the most. It is in this sense that law, morals, and even scientific thought were considered by him to be of *religious origin* (70). In their “just” versions, they uphold his vision of *homo duplex*, but when inverted, they represent sin. In *The Division of Labor*, he attacks anomy in all its forms, but prior to 1912, he seemed to have emphasized sin “in the practical order,” in the business world. After 1912, he turned his attention more toward the sin of reversing the premises of rationalism.

In *The Forms*, as in all his works, he asserted that “the rationalism which is imminent in the sociological theory of knowledge is thus midway between the classical empiricism and a *priorism*” (19). Only a year later, in his lectures entitled “Pragmatism and Sociology,” (1913-1914) he launched an all out attack on pragmatism as a reduction of reason to individual experience. He never came out and said pragmatism is sinful, but he did claim that it is nothing but logical utilitarianism (436), that it seeks to destroy the cult of truth (387), that it denies the sacrosanct quality of truth and that it seeks to level truth to individual perceptions, thereby making it profane (430). Just as he seems to have been extremely opposed to the capitalistic order in the practical world, he seems to have been extremely opposed to pragmatism and its positivistic derivatives in the world of thought. He has done nothing less than accuse much of what the Western world values as “sinful” (see also Durkheim, 1983: xi-xli).

I think that the connection between anomia and sin is the key to resolving the ambiguities of *Suicide*. Note that in his treatment of the four suicidal currents, egoism and anomy are treated as one pole of *homo duplex* and altruism and fatalism as the other. To complete the chiasmus, he treats egoism and altruism as currents that pertain to the intellect and anomy and fatalism to the passions. But all four currents, in the extreme, are prototypes of “sin” as it has been discussed here. Note that egoism is a state “in which the individual ego asserts itself to excess in the face of the social ego and at its expense” (Durkheim, [1897] 1951: 209). Is this not a variety of the inversion of the sacred and profane? And altruism, “where the ego is not its own property” (221) also violates the proper relationship of *homo duplex*, as does the excessive regulation of fatalism (276). Anomy is constantly referred to as “the spirit of progress” or rebellion, the prototype for sin. In effect, the societal “virtue” depends on the proper balance of four vices — a classical model, beyond a doubt (compare *Suicide* to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* or Plato’s *Republic*). It is no wonder that Durkheim concludes that “suicide is a close kin to genuine virtues, which it simply exaggerates” (371).

CONCLUSIONS

If the gulf between the sacred and the profane is an unbridgable abyss, anomy is any tendency to mingle the two opposites, even reverse their relationship. There are many examples of this secular sin in contemporary Western society. For example, O'Keefe (1982) begins with the kernel found in Durkheim (1912) and Mauss and Hubert (1904) that religion is essentially social while magic is essentially private, that magic is derived from religion, and that "magic takes a sort of professional pleasure in profaning holy things" (Durkheim [1912] 1971: 43). Magic is essentially sinful in that it "borrows" from religion in order to put "sacred scripts" to private, egoistic uses and because its scripts are so much more *rigid* than those used in religion. Magic is simultaneously excessive with regard to finitude *and* infinitude, the ideal type of anomy as sin. But as O'Keefe demonstrates, not only do modern persons engage in more magic than primitives, magic is interwoven in many of the phenomena we take for granted: the increase in the number of lawyers and lawsuits, the use of "magical" personal hygiene products, appliances and gadgets, the utilitarianism in our educational system, the rise of magic in Christian religions *and* unorthodox cults, even the popularity of the highly individualistic "action theory" in sociology! A researcher could operationalize any of these aspects of magic in contemporary life in general or religion in particular, and correlate them with suicide rates and death rates in general.

There are many other examples of anomy as it has been presented here in contemporary societies. Durkheim (1983) regarded pragmatism as nothing less than sinful, a violation of the sacrosanct character of truth. But pragmatism is *the* dominant philosophy in modern social theory. Is current "morality" any less derived from "economic matter" than when Durkheim made that charge in 1896? How much progress has been made with regard to the "religion of humanity" since Durkheim's time? As for death, the traditional consequence for "sin," medical sociologists have been claiming for a long time that most of the leading causes of death in the West today may be regarded as a kind of suicide attributable directly to the abuse of diet and to inappropriate social habits, ranging from lack of sufficient exercise to drinking and driving which has resulted in an epidemic of "unnatural" death, especially among young people (Rosengren, 1980: 50; Logan & Hunt, 1978). Durkheim had warned us that "we must not be dazzled by the brilliant development of sciences, the arts and industry of which we are the witnesses; this development is altogether certainly taking place in the midst of a morbid effervescence, the grievous repercussions of which each one of us feels" ([1897] 1951: 368).

Early pioneers in what is now medical sociology were aware of the *theological* intricacies in their analyses of the social origins of illness. Thus Selye, frequently regarded as the father of stress research, advocated a philosophy of "altruistic egoism" (1978: 449-461) as a way to fight stress. His solution is not much different from Durkheim's emphasis on the proper balance among the forces that comprise *homo duplex*. Dubos (1959) emphasized the quest for utopia in humankind's battle with disease, which is unattainable. Dubos and Hertz observe that since the myth of the Fall, death has been understood in our collective unconscious as the punishment for sin — that death always seems unnatural to the human mind (Hertz, 1907). In short, the collective religious representations pertaining to good and evil have been found to be important to non-religious concerns in sociology.

This essay can do no more than open a door to a convergence of ideas that should have caught the attention of scholars long ago. Durkheim never meant anything like normlessness by his use of anomy, and scholars ought to stop perpetuating this myth. Then, perhaps one will become interested in how others in his milieu used this concept, and how we may operationalize it.

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