

Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Classical Sociological Theory
Module Name/Title	Division of labour
Pre Requisites	Structural functional perspectives
Objectives	This module seeks to examine how the division of labour is organized in modern societies
Key words	Mechanical and organic solidarity, anomie, collective consciousness

Module Structure

EMILE DURKHHEIM'S THEORY OF DIVISION OF LABOUR	Division of labour, causes and conditions, abnormal forms, forced division of labour, anomic division of labour
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Classical Sociological Theory

EMILE DURKHHEIM'S THEORY OF DIVISION OF LABOUR

INTRODUCTION

According to Emile Durkheim, Division of labour is seen as the separation and specialization of work among people. By separation, it is meant that various components of the work process are separated. By this is meant that the various aspects that make up the work are set up into various component and co-functioning processes. For instance, in the production of a car, the productions of the tyres are separated from the production of the engines. According to my understanding, in these separated components, production can be maximized as in the production of the car, the producers will be able to produce several tyres while the producers of the engine will produce several engines. Therefore in Durkheim's opinion, separation leads to specialization. Because separation is viewed as one of the constitutive element of division of labour, it means that producers must be specialized in specific tasks in any activity of labour. Division of labour includes separation of the work force into different categories of labour; dividing the work required to produce a product into a number of different tasks that are performed by different workers. Durkheim specifically defines division of labour in the following words "...Social harmony comes essentially from the division of labour. It is characterized by a cooperation which is automatically produced through the pursuit in each individual of his own interests. It suffices that each individual consecrate himself to a special function in order, by the force of events, to make himself solidary with others." ¹

1.2. MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY, OR SOLIDARITY BY SIMILARITIES

In Mechanical solidarity social cohesion and integration occurs as a result of the commonness or the homogeneity of the individuals i.e. individuals believe they are connected through similar work, value systems, family, kinship, religion etc.

As defined by Durkheim, mechanical solidarity refers to

¹ Durkheim, E. (1982, first published 1893), *The Division of Labour in Society*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 200.

“Social solidarity based upon homogeneity of values and behaviour, strong social constraint, and loyalty to tradition and kinship. The term applied to small, non-literate societies characterised by a simple division of labour, very little specialisation of function, only a few social roles and very little tolerance of individuality.”²

As Durkheim has stated mechanical solidarity is solidarity of resemblance. It is rooted in the similarity of the individual members of a society who might share same desires, feelings and ideas towards the production of any given product.³ In the society where this kind of solidarity prevails individuals do not differ from one another much. They are the members of the same collectivity and resemble one another because “they feel the same emotions, cherish the same values, and hold the same things sacred.”⁴ They are really similar in thought and activity.

The society is coherent because the individuals are united by a common bond that unites them towards a common goal. They are not yet differentiated. “Here we find the strong states of the *Collective Conscience*. As the term suggests itself, it refers to the conscience of a group who would probably share the same ideals as presupposed in the notion of mechanical solidarity. According to Durkheim, he defines Collective conscience as “... the sum total of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of the society.”⁵ This prevails mostly in primitive societies. The common conscience completely covers individual mentality and morality. By this, it is implied that the common or collective conscience takes into view or consideration individual opinions or ideas. That is why it is called common because it envisages the common good which is not only common but also good. But sometimes because of the reality of the common or collective conscience individual conscience which may seem contrary to the expectation of the collective conscience might be repressed due to social pressure and to maintain social order or mechanical solidarity. In his own words, Durkheim says: “Here social constraint is expressed most decisively in repressive, severe criminal law which serves to maintain mechanical solidarity.”⁶

² W.P.Scott in “Dictionary of Sociology” Page -407.

³ Simpson, George (Trans.) in Durkheim, Emile "*The Division of Labour in Society*" The Free Press, New York, 1993. p. 9.

⁴ Ibid.

Ibid

⁵ Ibid. p. 10

⁶ Ibid

1.3. ORGANIC SOLIDARITY

According to Durkheim when the density of individuals increases to such a level that a new system of organization takes its place, where each of them are highly specialized in their respective areas but have to depend on the others to sustain their work interests is called organic solidarity.

According to Durkheim, organic solidarity refers to

“a type of social solidarity typical of modern industrial society, in which unity is based on the interdependence of a very large number of highly specialised roles in a system involving a complex division of labour that requires the co-operation of almost all the groups and individuals of the society. This type of solidarity is called organic because it is similar to the unity of a biological organism in which highly specialised parts or organs, must work in coordination if the organism [or any one of its parts] is to survive”⁷

It is quite clear from the above quote that organic solidarity is in opposition to the concept of mechanical solidarity. While in mechanical solidarity there is no differentiation, in organic solidarity, just like in differentiated biological cells, there is high level of specialization and specificity of differentiated organs designated for specific functions for the completion of a given function or task that when combined makes the organism a complete functioning unit. Organic solidarity is almost the opposite of mechanical solidarity. According to Durkheim, “Increasing density of population is the major key to the development of division of labour.”⁸ By this, the explanation is quite clear. In places where the population density is high, that is many more people per a given space, it is but obvious that some will be more suited for specific functions than others. So automatically there is division of labour so as to maximize production and profits in the corporate world. Organic solidarity emerges with the growth of the division of labour. This especially is witnessed in the modern industrial societies.

Division of labour and the consequent dissimilarities among men bring about increasing interdependence in society. The interdependence is reflected in human mentality and morality and in the fact of organic solidarity itself. In organic solidarity, consensus results from differentiation itself. By this we mean that a general agreement can be arrived at because each person is an expertise and specialize in his/her area of differentiation. The individuals are no longer similar, but different. In this way, each possesses complete autonomy in his area of expertise. Unless the

⁷ Durkheim, E. (1982, first published 1893), *The Division of Labour in Society*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 200.

⁸ Ibid.

individual errs, then they would be no difficulty of arriving at any given consensus. Because it is easy to arrive at a consensus, then decision making becomes easy and production and profit can be maximized. It is precisely because the individuals are different that consensus is achieved. According to Durkheim with the increase of the division of labour the collective conscience lessens. This has been explained above since collective conscience occurs as a result of lack of differentiation in mechanical solidarity. An increase in organic solidarity would represent moral progress stressing the higher values of equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice. This greatly highlights the ethical dimension for division of labour and it's a call for an evaluation. Even here, the social constraints in the form of contracts and laws continue to play a major role.

2.1. DIVISION OF LABOUR AND CIVILISATION

In determining the principal cause of the division of labour, Durkheim distinguishes it first from civilization. According to Durkheim,

Civilization is itself the necessary consequence of the changes which are produced in the volume and in the density of societies. If science, art, and economic activity develop it is in accordance with a necessity which is imposed upon men. It is because there is, for them, no other way of living in the new conditions in which they have been placed. From the time that the number of individuals among whom social relations are established begins to increase, they can maintain themselves only by greater specialization, harder work, and intensification of their faculties. From this general stimulation, there inevitably results a much higher degree of culture. From this point of view, civilization appears, not as an end which moves people by its attraction for them, not as a good foreseen and desired in advance, of which they seek to assure themselves the largest possible part, but as the effect of a cause, as the necessary resultant of a given state. It is not the pole towards which historic development is moving and to which men seek to get nearer in order to be happier or better, for neither happiness nor morality necessarily increases with the intensity of life. They move because they must move, and what determines the speed of this march is the more or less strong pressure which they exercise upon one another, according to their number.⁹

In Durkheim sociological contention, he doubts that the advance of civilization increases human happiness in any case.¹⁰ But civilization does bring about some change. Or put in another way the changes we may experience effect civilization. But civilization presupposes advancement

⁹ Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, (Translated by George Simpson). By New York: The Free Press, 1947.

¹⁰ Ibid.

which to the human mind at any given period is a given good. But the supposed good that this brings about could be abused just like any other things which are useful yet are abused. Therefore, even civilization does not bring about happiness or increase in better life standard, it is not because it fails to do so in itself but because there could be a possible abuse which may not increase happiness directly. Aristotelian Metaphysics presupposes that any action performed by a human person has an underlying agenda which is to obtain a greater degree of happiness and pleasure. But he does admit that we enjoy pleasures which were unknown to earlier societies. These pleasures cannot be enjoyed in exactly the same way because civilization brings about something new. Therefore some newness is being added to previous pleasure otherwise as we learn in economics they would be diminishing returns if nothing new ever comes up. Even if social progress does produce more pleasure than pain, Durkheim insists, this would not necessarily bring more happiness; for according to Robert Alun Jones on Emile Durkheim: *An Introduction to Four Major Works*,

“Pleasure” describes the local, limited, momentary state of a particular function, while “happiness” describes the health of the physical and moral species in its entirety, the extent to which that species has realized its true nature. Thus, the normal savage is just as happy as the normal civilized man, but also by the rapid rise in the suicide rate commensurate with the advance in civilization, a phenomenon in which Durkheim already had a powerful interest.¹¹

Pleasure could be momentary but happiness is lasting. But in happiness, there is always some degree of pleasure. If civilization is properly used then it can realize happiness in us for happiness lies not in civilization in man but it can be predicated only of humans or a smart phone cannot be happy on its own but he who possesses it can derive some satisfaction or happiness from using it to contact friends and do some research on an assignment given by a professor.

2.2. DIVISION OF LABOUR AND THE ‘HAPPINESS HYPOTHESIS’

In the previous chapter we discussed Durkheim’s view on civilization in relation to happiness in relation to division of labour. In the following paragraphs we will explain briefly and

¹¹ Robert Alun Jones. *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1986. Pp. 28.

summarily, division of labour and the happiness hypothesis. This will be viewed in relation to the causes of division of labour. In relation to this, one commentator commenting on Durkheim says

*Durkheim's inquiry into causes rehearsed his earlier analysis of functions; for, just as the earlier discussion began with Durkheim's rejection of Adam Smith's argument that the function of the division of labour was the advancement of civilization, so the later discussion began with a negative assessment of that "classic" explanation, attributed to political economy in general, whereby the cause of the division of labour would be "man's unceasing desire to increase his happiness."*¹²

Durkheim rejects the fact that the function or cause of division of labour is advancement in human civilization. This was particular true a proposition of Adam Smith. He also denies that the cause of division of labour is human's unceasing desire or happiness. Durkheim does insist that the intensity of any agreeable stimulus can increase usefully (i.e., contribute to increased pleasure) only between two extremes.¹³ An increase in monetary wealth, for instance, must be of a certain size if pleasure is to be its result; inversely, a person thoroughly accustomed to large increases in wealth estimates the value of such increases accordingly, and is equally denied pleasure proportionate to the stimulus received. The increase in income experienced by the man of average wealth is thus the one most apt to produce a degree of pleasure proportionate to its cause.¹⁴ Therefore, understood from the above quotation of Robert Alun analysis on Durkheim,

*If the cause of the division of labour were the desire for happiness, therefore, social evolution would surely have come to a stop long ago; for the maximum happiness of which men are capable would have been achieved through a relatively moderate development of social differentiation and its resulting stimuli.*¹⁵

According to the above quote, the desire of happiness cannot be the cause of the division of labour. If this were the case, then social evolution would have long come to an end. Because man would have long obtained the happiness he desires through a low level of social differentiation. Robert Alun Jones reiterates that this insistence that the human capacity for happiness is very limited, a

¹² Robert Alun Jones. *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1986. P. 28.

¹³ *Ibid*.

¹⁴ Robert Alun Jones. *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1986. Pp. 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 29.

kind of Aristotelian ethics augmented by Wundt's *Grundzuge der physiologische Psychologie* (1874), remained one of Durkheim's most constant and characteristic ideas.¹⁶

Further, Durkheim also argues against the fact that pleasure (which is at least an element in happiness) loses its intensity with repetition, and can be recaptured only through new stimuli, meaning more productive work (and hence, through the division of labour).¹⁷ He objects thus:

*First, such a "law" would apply to all societies, and thus it could provide no account of why the division of labour advances in some societies and not in others. Second, Durkheim denied the assumption on which the argument is based: namely, that repetition alone reduces the intensity of pleasure. So long as our pleasures have a certain variety, he argues, they can be repeated endlessly; only if the pleasure is continuous and uninterrupted does its intensity wane.*¹⁸

Therefore he rejects the view of happiness or pleasure being the cause of happiness because they could be varied pleasures and one could not get bored.

The cause of the division of labour according to Durkheim must be sought in some social contexts. Durkheim shows, in his dissertation, how the organized structure (and thus the division of labour) develops as the segmental structure disappears; thus, either the disappearance of the segmental structure is the cause of the division of labour, or vice versa.¹⁹ Therefore according to Robert Alun analysis, since, as we have seen, the segmental structure is an insurmountable obstacle to the division of labour, the latter hypothesis is clearly false; the division of labour can thus appear only in proportion as the segmental structure has already begun to disappear.²⁰ This means that instead of social life being concentrated in a number of small, identical individual segments, these parts begin to extend beyond their limits, exchange movements, and act and react upon one another.²¹ (Cr. Robert Alun. 30). Durkheim calls this *dynamic* or *moral density*, and suggests that it increases in direct ratio to the progress of the division of labour. But what produces this "moral density"? Durkheim points out two causes. First, the real, material distance between members of a society must be reduced both spatially (e.g., the growth of cities) and technologically (e.g., advances in

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Robert Alun Jones. *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1986. P.29

²⁰ *Ibid.* 30

²¹ *Ibid.*

communications and transportation), for such “material density” multiplies the number of intra-societal relations. Second, this effect is reinforced by the sheer “social volume” of a society (the total number of its members). Thus, Durkheim argues that the division of labour varies in direct ratio to the dynamic or moral density of society, which is itself an effect of both material density and social volume.²²

But how, one may ask, does this double cause (material density and social volume) produce its ultimate effect (the division of labour)? Durkheim in fact agrees that a diversity of external circumstances has this differentiating effect; but he denies that this diversity was sufficient to *cause* (rather than merely *accelerate*) an effect so dramatic as the division of labour.²³

For his own explanation, Durkheim turns to Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), arguing that an increased material density and social volume causes the division of labour, not because they increase exposure to diverse external circumstances, but because they render the struggle for existence more acute. This is based on Darwin’s comprehension of competition. Darwin had argued that as long as resources were plentiful and population size was limited, similar organisms could exist alongside in relative peace; but where population increases and resources become scarce, conflict and competition ensue, and this conflict is just as active as the organisms are similar and pursue similar needs. Where organisms are different and pursue different needs, on the other hand, what is useful to one organism will be of no value to another, and conflict will diminish.²⁴

Through a greater division of labour, those organs which disappear may establish themselves further by specialization in some other ways to adapt to changing situations and responding to needs. Thus, the conflict and competition resulting from an increase in social volume and density produces advances in the division of labour just as the latter mitigates against the negative consequences of the former.²⁵ In the modern city, for example, large and highly condensed populations can coexist peacefully as a consequence of occupational differentiation: “The soldier seeks military glory, the priest moral authority, the statesman power, the businessman riches, the

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Robert Alun Jones. *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1986. P.29.

²⁵ Robert Alun Jones. *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1986. P.30

scholar scientific renown. Each of them can attain his end without preventing the others from obtaining theirs.”²⁶ Therefore, inferring from previous arguments, nothing in this process, Durkheim adds, implies an increase in happiness, or that the pursuit of happiness might be its goal: on the contrary, “everything takes place mechanically” as the result of an inexorable law of social progress.²⁷ Further, Durkheim thus argues forcefully that the division of labour is caused by changes in the volume and density of societies.²⁸ But this was not yet a complete explanation, for Durkheim recognises that such specialization is not the only possible solution to the struggle for existence which may ensue. The division of labour is thus a contingent rather than a necessary consequence of changes in the social environment, and for it rather than its alternatives to result, it is essential that the influence of at least two secondary factors -- the *conscience collective* and heredity -- be significantly reduced.²⁹ In this line of thought therefore, in so far as the *conscience collective* thus becomes less concrete and decisive, it necessarily has less of an impact on individual thought and behavior. Precise states of *conscience* act in a manner analogous to instinctive reflexes; more general principles affect behavior only through the intervening reflections of intelligence. Thus, “deliberated movements have not the spontaneity of involuntary movements. Because it becomes more rational, the [*conscience collective*] becomes less imperative, and for this very reason, it wields less restraint over the free development of individuals.”³⁰ But the cause of this growth of rationality, again, is the increase in the volume of the society’s population and the environmental diversity thus implied.³¹

THE ABNORMAL FORMS

At the end of *The Division of Labour in Society*, Durkheim does note that there can be problems in society. These could be moments of crises or conflicts. There are two abnormal forms of the division of labour, these are the anomic division of labour and the forced division of labour.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 31.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁹ Robert Alun Jones. *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1986. P.34.

³⁰ *Ibid*.

³¹ *Ibid*, 35.

Division of labour itself does not always function as well as it could in modern society because of these abnormal forms.³²

3.1. ANOMIC DIVISION OF LABOUR.

This may arise as a result of industrial and commercial crises, there may be a partial break in organic solidarity. A break in organic solidarity implies that a consensus may be difficult to arrive as one component which may complete the given task could be lacking. Also, where there is conflict between capital and labour, this may be an unusual situation.³³ Part of this is caused by the increased separation of employee and employer under capitalism, so that the conditions for a lack of solidarity are expanded as capitalism and the division of labour develop.³⁴ Irregular forms such as crime are not treated as part of the breakdown, rather these are treated by Durkheim as differentiation (*Division*, p. 353), not part of division of labour.³⁵ Durkheim compares these with cancer, rather than with normal organs.³⁶

The real problem for a breakdown or abnormal forms is a lack of regulation or a weakened common morality that can occur in modern society. For instance, in the economic sphere, one would realize that there are no rules which fix the number of economic enterprises, and there is no regulation of production in each branch of industry.³⁷ This might be an overall form of irrationality. There can be ruptures in equilibrium, capital labour relations may become indeterminate. In the scientific field there may be greater separation of different sciences.³⁸ (*Division*, p. 367).

According to Ritzer (1992), he explains this in the following paragraph thus:

If the division of labour does not produce solidarity in all these cases, it is because the relations of the organs are not regulated, because they are in a state of anomy. For the individual this means there are not sufficient moral

³² <http://uregina.ca/~gingrich/s16f02.htm>

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Durkheim, Emile. 1933. *The Division of Labor in Society* Translated by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press, 354

³⁵ Durkheim, Emile. 1933. *The Division of Labor in Society* Translated by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press, 354.

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid*, 366.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 367..

*constraints and individuals do not have a clear concept of what is proper and acceptable.*³⁹

This is quite self-explanatory and explains just what has been explained above. But the aspect of sufficient moral constraints further brings out the necessity of a moral dimension when it comes to division of labour. Also,

*The state of anomy is impossible when solidary organs are sufficiently in contact or sufficiently prolonged. ... if some opaque environment is interposed, then only stimuli of a certain intensity can be communicated from one organ to another. Relations, being rare, are not repeated enough to be determined.*⁴⁰

This is quite clear in relation to the above explanations as well.

Durkheim also discusses conditions of the worker under capitalism in terms that come very close to Marx's description of alienation and exploitation. He discusses the degrading nature of the division of labour on the worker, the possibility of monotonous routine, and the machine like actions of the worker.⁴¹ (*Division*, p. 371). However, Durkheim does not consider these to be the normal form, but one which results when the worker does not have a sufficient vision of the whole process of production. In view of this, he posits that:

*... The division of labour does not produce these consequences because of a necessity of its own nature, but only in exceptional and abnormal circumstances. ... The division of labour presumes that the worker, far from being hemmed in by his task, does not lose sight of his collaborators that he acts upon them, and reacts to them. He is, then, not a machine who repeats his movements without knowing their meaning, but he knows that they tend, in some way, towards an end that he conceives more or less distinctly.*⁴² (*Division*, p. 372).

Collaboration is very vital in division of labour. If a partner does not collaborate, then individual parts will come to mean nothing. It is only when specialist's works in view of a

³⁹ Cfr. Ritzer, George, *Sociological Theory*, third edition, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1992. P 85.

⁴⁰ Durkheim, Emile. 1933. *The Division of Labor in Society* Translated by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press, 368-9.

⁴¹ Durkheim, Emile. 1933. *The Division of Labor in Society* Translated by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press, 371.

⁴² Ibid. 372.

goal can their work having meaning and is productive. This is where partners have to collaborate for the realization of a common goal in the division of labour.

3.2. FORCED DIVISION OF LABOUR.

Another anomaly is the forced division of labour. The forced division of labour is where the division of labour is not allowed to develop spontaneously, and where some act to protect themselves and their positions. Here division of labour might not be voluntary. Something obstructs its natural flow. There is bound to be a breakdown in this process. Some of these which cause a breakdown could be traditional forms, which are external to the division of labour, or they could be castes, Weber's status groups, or Marx's classes. Any factors that prevent individuals from achieving positions which would be consistent with their natural abilities indicates a force division of labour. Ritzer notes (p. 98) that this could be inequalities in the structure of work or inadequate organization, with the wrong people in particular positions or incoherent organizational structures. This is quite evident in today's society and could greatly affect outputs. Any interference with the operation of the division of labour that results in the position being filled by those who are not most apt for the position would mean forced division of labour. In some society where the rich and strong rule, one could experience that through bribes, the unqualified could take up some specific jobs and make a whole mess out of it. Therefore,

We may say that the division of labour produces solidarity only if it is spontaneous and in proportion as it is spontaneous. ... In short, labour is divided spontaneously only if society is constituted in such a way that social inequalities exactly express natural inequalities. ... It consists, not in a state of anarchy which would permit men freely to satisfy all their good or bad tendencies, but in a subtle organization in which each social value, being neither overestimated nor underestimated by anything foreign to it, would be judged at its worth.⁴³

Of course, wealth interferes with this, but Durkheim views this as abnormal and not the normal tendency. Further,

Even this last inequality, which comes about through birth, though not completely disappearing, is at least somewhat attenuated. Society is forced to reduce this

⁴³ Durkheim, Emile. 1933. *The Division of Labor in Society* Translated by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press, 376.

disparity as far as possible by assisting in various ways those who find themselves in a disadvantageous position and by aiding them to overcome it."⁴⁴

In my view, inequalities could easily be avoided so that we promote a meaningful division of labour in which all the members of society could have equal chance and opportunity.

CONCLUSION

Durkheim's ideas on the Division of labour are quite plausible enough and relevant for our world today. For our world with increasing population, I think that the only way to maximize output is through high division of labour where all individuals within society work together for the common good realized in the collective conscience brought about by mechanical solidarity where there is no differentiation. His view of organic solidarity which brings about differentiation is quite plausible enough. Organic solidarity is at the heart of division of labour. Also the desire for happiness can lead to the cause of division of labour though Durkheim insists on causes within social structures like population density.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 379.