

SOC116: History of Sociological Thought

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Leading Questions: Emile Durkheim's *Suicide*

- 1. What is the basic gist of the investigation that makes Suicide the paradigmatic example of sociological research?**
- 2. What empirical relationship between suicide rates and economics does Durkheim make note of?**
- 3. Do suicides simply increase with economic hardship and decrease when the pressure lets up?**

No, higher suicide rates can accompany both a drop off in the economy and a marked recovery. "So far is the increase in poverty from causing the increase in suicide that even fortunate crises, the effect of which is abruptly to enhance a country's prosperity, affect suicide like economic disasters" (110b1).

- 4. What pattern does Durkheim observe in relation between international expositions and suicide?**

Suicide increases around time of expositions (111a9-b1). This is surprising since such expositions suggest good times.

- 5. What is Durkheim's conclusion about suicide and economics?**

"If therefore industrial or financial crises increase suicides, this is not because they cause poverty, since crises of prosperity have the same result; it is because they are crises, that is, disturbances of the collective order" (112a2).

- 6. Consider "a dim perception, in the moral consciousness of societies, of the respective value of different social services. ..." (113b8). What is Durkheim referring to here?**

A collective sense of "station," of the just rewards associated with different social positions. With this, individuals can control their aspirations and wants and needs to something like that which is attainable. Later, we'll see this idea re-emerge in Merton's theory of anomia.

- 7. Even if economic inheritance were eliminated and so everyone started out with the same material advantages, "a moral discipline would therefore still be required to make those less favored by nature accept the lesser advantages" (115a2). Explain.**
- 8. Durkheim keeps saying "for this to be effective, it must be considered just" and "to be effective, it must have the power to dominate individuals." What's he getting at?**
- 9. Insight at 115a9-b2. Explicate.**

The thing that reins us in is society (in our heads). In times of upheaval and crisis, its hold on us is attenuated.

10. Reading page 116, what is "anomy"?

"state of deregulation"

11. So, summarize "anomic suicide."

12. What's the author up to in the last section?

One could cite passages here and spin them to make Durkheim look fundamentally conservative and his theory to be theory of "don't rock the boat" and anti-social change. Or, one could show that he leaves room for change and the redress of social injustice and inequality if one looks beyond first impressions. Can you find support for these points?