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EMILE DURKHEIM

(1858-1917)

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Emile Durkheim viewed education within the framework of the plan to construct what he wished to be a genuine ‘social science’. That plan was itself determined by a variety of circumstances—Durkheim’s own childhood background, the historical situation of France after the war with Germany and the defeat of 1870, and the long period of social and political unrest his country was experiencing. He was born in Epinal in eastern France in 1852, and while still an adolescent, renounced the Jewish faith—his father was a rabbi—and decided on his future career as a philosophy teacher. Between 1879 and 1882, he attended the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris. Young though he was at the time, he had been deeply affected by the tragedy of the Commune (March-May 1871), a civil war of sorts following the defeat; he acquired the conviction that if he were ever to teach, his mission would be to help his compatriots forge a path towards a society which, in unity and solidarity, would transcend its own conflicts, and to foster changes in society that would lead to cohesion, enabling his fellow-citizens to experience what he called ‘the ultimate good’ communion with others.

Those were indeed times of trouble and deep crisis in France. On the political front, the Third Republic managed to emerge in 1875 from the bitter struggles between Republicans and Royalists. On the economic front, the rise of industrial capitalism came up against an increasingly acute awareness on the part of the working classes, which were becoming more organized, in particular under the influence of socialist theories and Marxism. Added to this was the gradual emergence of a ‘secular’ spirit seeking to counter the Church’s hold on education. The physical and natural sciences were making great strides at the time, strengthening people’s confidence in the might of the scientific approach. The young Emile sensed that he had a role to play in the progress of his society and that by choosing to be a teacher he could contribute to that progress through education.

But teaching what a group is and showing people what a ‘good society’ could be, presupposed a far-reaching scientific inquiry into what a society is. Even before he entered the ENS, Durkheim had already reflected on the crucial question of the relations between the individual and the group, of what formed the basis of societies, and believed that, in order to construct a scientific sociology, there was an urgent need to go beyond political and social ideologies. The years spent at the ENS were decisive in that regard, for it was there that the threads of this plan for an action that was both political and pedagogical were drawn together, but it was an action that first required a digression from scientific theory, with the introduction of a new variable into the process of social change, namely sociological awareness of society’s own representation of itself.

In 1882 he made up his mind. It was the beginning of a career in which the work of Durkheim the sociologist reinforced that of Durkheim the missionary (or indeed prophet) concerned with defining the conditions of existence of a society that respected the individual,

and evolving the models of the kind of school and teaching that would make such conditions possible.

The question that was his point of departure was the very one that exercised the minds of the political and social thinkers of the time—should preference be given to the good of the individual or to that of society? Was it better to be ‘individualistic’, as advocated by the liberals and economists, or ‘socialist’ in the sense understood by Proudhon and Marx? From the time he left the ENS, Durkheim persistently sought to show that the integration of a modern society stemming from the rise of capitalism was dependent on a new definition of individualism and socialism which only social science could provide.

After a few years of teaching philosophy in secondary schools, Durkheim was appointed in 1887 to a lectureship in ‘social science and pedagogy’ at the Faculty of Arts in Bordeaux, before taking up, at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1902, a chair in the ‘science of education’, later renamed ‘science of education and sociology’, a post he held until his death in 1917.

The institutionalization of a science of education was accordingly inseparable from Durkheim’s formal definition of sociology itself. The ‘father’ of French sociology was thus to be the first educational sociologist, just at the time when Jules Ferry, the Minister of Public Instruction between 1882 and 1886, was laying the foundations of a secular, compulsory and egalitarian school system.²

Placed as it was in the context of the construction of a social science which he saw as playing a leading part in the evolution of societies, Durkheim’s conception of education must therefore be associated with his model for the analysis of social facts—a model conducive to seeing education from the standpoint of both its nature and its development.

The structure-function model and educational sociology

From the outset, Durkheim’s model posits the specific nature of social phenomena, which cannot, in particular, be reduced to psychological factors. Even if the sociologist needs psychology as a point of reference, the rule is to explain the social by the social. It is also a model with an avowed debt to the contribution of the ‘early sociologists’, which Durkheim willingly acknowledged—namely the analogy between a society and a living organism, made up of organs (structure) fulfilling functions.³ In order to understand a social fact, its causes and purposes must first be identified.

Durkheim’s originality lies in the fact that he approached structure-function analysis from two parallel standpoints. On the one hand, the group (or society), made up of its organic components, is identified with a systemic entity—hence we may speak of a social system and sub-systems responding to social needs. On the other, the social system, at any given time, is seen as lending itself to analysis in terms of superimposed stages, the relations and interactions between which have to be made clear. This is the substrate of the social system (its material existence), its institutions and collective representations. It may be added that analysis in terms of ‘responses to needs’ places emphasis on looking for efficient or final causes and that analysis in terms of ‘stages’ seeks a causality that could be described as causality of expression.

For a thorough understanding of Durkheim’s educational sociology, his fundamental works *Education et sociologie*, *L’éducation morale*, and *L’évolution pédagogique en France* should be considered in the light of these two approaches to structure-function analysis, which cannot in fact be considered separately.

THE FUNCTION OF EDUCATION

In order to determine the ‘function’ fulfilled by a social phenomenon, writes Durkheim in *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, the first thing to be established is ‘whether there is any correspondence between the fact considered and the general needs of the social organism and wherein this correspondence lies’ (p. 95).⁴

In an article written in 1911 entitled ‘Education, its Nature and Role’ published in *Education et sociologie*, Durkheim asserts, on the basis of ‘historical observation’, that ‘every society, considered at a given moment in its development, has a system of education which is imposed on individuals’. Every society sets itself a certain ‘human ideal’, an ideal of what a person should be from the intellectual, physical and moral points of view; this ideal is the crux of education. Society can subsist ‘only if there is sufficient homogeneity among its members’. Education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by inculcating in the child’s mind the fundamental relationships required by life in the community. Through education, the ‘individual being’ is turned into a ‘social being’. This homogeneity is, however, only relative—in societies characterized by a division of labour, the greater the differentiation and solidarity between various types of occupation, the more a certain degree of heterogeneity is necessary.

We thus arrive at the following definition: education is the action exercised by the adult generations over those that are not yet ready for social life. Its purpose is to arouse and develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him both by the political society as a whole and by the specific environment for which he is particularly destined. (...) It emerges from the foregoing definition that education consists of a methodical socialization of the young generation (*Education et sociologie*, p. 51).⁵

This view of education as ‘methodical socialization’ corresponds to the need for any society to secure the bases of its ‘conditions of existence’ and of its durability. It begins from birth, within the family, of course, but it becomes systematic at school, with the result that school becomes the focus of social continuity when it comes to the transmission of values, standards and knowledge; hence Durkheim’s practically exclusive concern with the school system, including universities.

The definition proposed above, however, merely describes the ‘fact’ or essential nature of education at a given moment, from a static point of view, so to speak. However, not only do societies ‘change’, evolve and have a history, but within those societies themselves, the institutionalized education systems that are consistent with their needs also evolve and, in turn, generate their own needs. The ‘science of education’ as the objective study of the social fact of ‘education’ must consequently situate these systems in the context of a general dynamic which can in fact be described by analysing it in terms of stages in social reality.

THE SOCIAL SYSTEM AND THE SCHOOL SUB-SYSTEM

Durkheim focused his study of the ‘socialization of the young generations’ in schools, within the ‘school system’, which he sometimes referred to as the ‘machine’ and viewed as an organ fulfilling a function, but one that derived its meaning from the global system that a national society represents, for example. Durkheim’s originality lay in demonstrating that although this ‘sub-system’ is dependent on the social system as a whole, it none the less possesses the structural features peculiar to any social system; this confers upon it a ‘relative autonomy’ and, like any social system, it is subjected simultaneously to forces of permanence and forces of change—forces of permanence that are derived from the system as a whole, and forces of change that respond to emerging needs and are specific to it.

The Durkheimian approach to the school sub-system and its evolution, which he saw

as necessary, must therefore be understood in terms of its homology with his model of social dynamics.

Let us consider the main thrust of the Durkheimian model. Central to it is the concept of *conscience collective* (a collective conscience or collective consciousness). A society is composed of individuals who ‘cohere’ because they share common values and rules, partly transmitted by school. Society, as an object constructed by sociology, neither transcends individuals nor is immanent in them, but has its own specific nature defined by the parameters of ‘integration’ (allegiance to the group) and ‘regulation’ (recognition of rules controlling individual behaviour). This *conscience collective* is reflected in collective phenomena ranging from the strictly mental level of collective representations to the level of ‘institutions’ and that of a ‘material substrate’ (volume and density of population, communications, buildings, etc.). Durkheim uses the metaphor ‘crystallization’ to designate this presence of a *conscience collective* in all sectors of social life. Here, two points need to be made clear: on the one hand, the ‘stages’ of the representations and institutions comprise both formalized aspects (established ideologies, written law) and non-formalized aspects (‘effervescent’ events, customs); on the other hand, there are two-way relations of causality: substrate-institutions-representations and, vice versa, representations-institutions-substrate.

It was this analytical model that enabled Durkheim to address the problem of change: emerging new collective representations tend to be translated into new institutions, provided that these representations correspond to new social needs. This heralds periods in which conflicts between forces of stagnation and forces of change have to be resolved. The increasing division of labour in modern societies demands that more attention should be paid to the individual. This gives rise to ‘individualist’ ideologies which, in turn, result in the emergence of institutions to protect ‘human rights’. According to Durkheim, this broad pattern was equally applicable to the school system in which, at any given moment in history, the educational sociologist would be able to discern pedagogical representations, both formalized and ‘effervescent’, institutions and, of course, a substrate (classroom organization, school structure). These three ‘entities’ are obviously linked to the global societal system, but have relative autonomy to the extent that any system responds to specific needs—here, ‘educational’ needs. An article on secondary education, written in 1905, is significant in this regard:

Any school system is made up of two kinds of components. On the one hand, there are a whole series of fixed stable arrangements and established methods, in a word, institutions; but, at the same time, within the machine thus constituted, there are underlying ideas at work, urging it to change. Seen from the outside, secondary education appears to us as a series of establishments whose physical and moral organization is fixed; but, seen from another angle, that same organization harbours aspirations seeking fulfilment. Underlying this fixed, consolidated existence there is a life on the move which, though less visible, is by no means insignificant (‘L’évolution et le rôle de l’enseignement secondaire en France’, in: *Education et sociologie*, 1905, p. 122).⁶

In his series of lectures published under the title *L’évolution pédagogique en France*, Durkheim adopts an analytical approach that shows how the ‘history’ of secondary and higher education since the Middle Ages has been marked by a series of changes resulting from both new political and economic trends, and from the emergence of new attitudes and needs and—where the school system affected by these changes is concerned—from new, partly autonomous pedagogical aspirations. The overview proposed by Durkheim in these lectures demonstrates clearly that educational reforms do not only reflect the general context but also illustrate the way in which the school takes care of emerging needs that are not yet institutionalized in political society as a whole. This explains how the subjects of study which constitute the ‘content’ of education at any given time can give rise to ‘categories of thought’, which in turn influence the development of a society’s collective representations.

Social dynamics and pedagogy

If, like Durkheim, we understand pedagogy as the implicit or explicit theoretical formulation of educational practice, we must ask ourselves what contribution the science of education can make to pedagogy or, more precisely, in what way the sociology of modernity can influence not only the analysis of the education system, but also the forms of pedagogy practised within that system.

Since modern society is based on growing industrialization and increasing division of labour, the result is a greater degree of differentiation in social roles, the specialization of social functions and, eventually, a risk that ‘social solidarity’ will disintegrate. This risk must be offset, says Durkheim, by the development—which indeed is observable—of the ultimate values relating to the legitimization of rights and to the responsibility and role of social actors.

RESPECT FOR HUMANITY IN THE HUMAN BEING, THE ULTIMATE VALUE

As early as 189, in *De la division du travail social*, Durkheim gave a broad definition of a ‘modern individualism’, in which respect for the human person was held up as the ultimate and, indeed, only value capable of ensuring cohesion in modern industrial societies. Four years later, in *Le suicide*, he asserted that if there was still something that human beings could share, it was respect for human beings as human beings, and that respect was the only social cement that remained, the only ‘genuine social bond’. After 1895, having established that religion or religions exist in all societies, with God (or the gods) symbolizing society itself in the eyes of the social actors, and that the ‘sacredness’ of religion expresses the transcendent character of the group, Durkheim came to the conclusion that it was man himself, in his ‘humanity’, who became a ‘God for man’, a new form of sacredness exclusive of any other. An 1898 essay entitled ‘Individualism and intellectuals’ defined this new form of individualism that should ‘henceforth’ take concrete shape through political and social changes:

We are heading more and more towards a State in which the members of any one social group will have nothing left in common other than their human quality, the attributes constituting the human person in general. (...) There is nothing left for men to love and honour together, other than man himself. This is how man has become a god for man and why he can no longer, without lying to himself, create any other gods for himself. And as every one of us embodies some part of humanity, every individual conscience has something divine about it and bears the imprint of a character which renders it sacred and inviolable to others (‘Individualism and intellectuals’, in: *La science sociale et l’action*, pp. 271-72).⁷

Durkheim drew economic and political conclusions from the need—associated with the conditions of existence of modern industrial societies—to recognize ‘personalist’ values as the basis of social consensus. In his *Leçons de sociologie*, in particular, he described in broad outline an ‘emerging’ society which, at the economic level, transcended class conflicts, distributed rewards on ‘merit’ and ensured maximum equality of opportunity among human beings.

In the same book, he developed a theory of the modern State as a ‘group of functionaries’ in permanent communication with the other groups making up society, a State attentive to humanistic values and responsible for open decisions. Such a society could be termed democratic and meritocratic, or even ‘individualist’⁸; (*Leçons de sociologie*, seventh lesson); it could also be termed ‘socialist’, but in relation to the kind of humanistic socialism

that Durkheim saw at work ‘in the progress of superior societies’⁹ (‘On the definition of socialism’, in: *La science sociale et l’action*, p. 25).

WHAT PEDAGOGY?

As he sought to discern the effects of the emergence of humanistic values on pedagogy, Durkheim was confronted with three tasks: establishing how the school system could fulfil a function of ‘preserving’ the social system as a whole while at the same time bringing about ‘change’; how pedagogical ‘practices’ could be linked to both the formal and the informal institutions elaborated by global society, and by what process they were the result of ‘ideas’ latent in the school system; and, finally, what pedagogical ‘models’ should be used to ‘teach’ pupils both the sense of ‘communion with others’ and scientific and literary ‘knowledge’.

In 1902, shortly before his appointment to the Sorbonne, Durkheim wrote in a letter to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl that he was ‘the oldest provincial pedagogue’, with ‘fifteen years’ experience in pedagogical teaching’. Only the titles of his lectures have come down to us, but we do have the full text of those he gave in 1894 on moral education and in 1905 on the evolution of secondary education in France. In the same letter, he said that, as a sociologist, he was bothered by the ‘ambiguous character of pedagogy (as both an art and a science)’, adding, however, that he felt at home when dealing with moral education.¹⁰

A closer scrutiny should therefore be made of the lecture reproduced in *L’éducation morale*, which was published in 1902, but which he had first given in 1894 and subsequently took up again on many occasions. In the context of the period, with its laws on secular education, Durkheim sought to establish that there might very well be a rational basis for a ‘moral’ (and not only ‘intellectual’) education, which derived its authority neither from religion nor from pure ideologies. More profoundly, he was convinced that rationalist faith and a person-oriented scheme for action were not separable, and that children should therefore be taught to submit voluntarily to the rules of a society that placed the cult of the person at the heart of its values.

It was for educational sociology, first, to determine the purposes of education, by reference to the general model developed by Durkheim according to which the functioning of any society was to be analysed in terms of mechanisms of ‘integration’ (the will to ‘live together’) and mechanisms of ‘regulation’ (submission to communal norms). In modern industrial society, or in a society undergoing modernization, the socialization of the child must involve learning at both these levels, with due regard for his/her own autonomy. The necessary control over selfish and anti-social drives and desires must be correlated to ‘group teaching’ so as to stimulate in the child the sense of community life, while making it possible for the pupil to be a creative person. Three ‘elements of morality’ thus determine the form and content of the purposes that educational sociology assigns to education at school—teaching the ‘sense of discipline’, ‘attachment to groups’ and ‘autonomy of will’.

Giving children ‘a sense of discipline’, in other words a predilection for regularity and abiding by the rules, is a way of helping them to overcome the state of ‘anomie’ or bewilderment that would take possession of them if they followed only the dictates of unrestrained desires. Here, Durkheim’s underlying argument is a psychological one—only the group (or only ‘one’ group, including the family) can regulate the insatiable ‘appetites’ latent in every person, and thus ensure individual equilibrium. It is in that sense that the spirit of discipline not only counteracts the spirit of social anarchy, but ensures self-control by the person himself:

Moral discipline is not only useful for moral life as such; its action extends beyond that. It plays a significant role in the shaping of character and of the personality in general. Indeed, what is most essential in character is the

aptitude to exercise self-control, the faculty of restraint, or, as they say, inhibition that enables us to contain our passions and desires and to call them to order. (...) Discipline is useful, therefore, not only in the interest of society and as an indispensable means without which there would be no regular co-operation, but in the interest of the individual himself. Especially in democratic societies like ours children must be taught this healthy moderation. This is because the conventional barriers which forcibly curbed desires and ambitions in societies organized differently have partly fallen away and so only moral discipline is left to exercise this regulatory function (*L'éducation morale*, pp. 9-42).¹¹

But this 'healthy moderation' is possible only if the child grasps the meaning of the communal interest and learns to see society 'in itself and for itself'. Here again, Durkheim had recourse to a psychological premise, namely that a person only achieves self-fulfilment as a member of a group. Attachment to the group is, moreover, one of the components of 'attachment to the human being as a human being' and accordingly helps to foster respect for others in the individual within the emerging humanistic society: 'Attachment to the group indirectly but almost necessarily implies attachment to individuals and, when the group ideal is merely a particular form of the human ideal, it is to the human being as a human being that we are attached, while feeling a deeper sense of solidarity with those who more specifically personify our society's particular conception of humanity' (*L'éducation morale*, p. 70).¹²

Here again we find, behind this conception of the individual's submission to the authority of rules and to the group proclaiming those rules, the idea that social consensus implies the cult of individual personality. Autonomy of will, the third 'element' of morality, means that the future citizen, at school, must understand rationally, and indeed feel the need and the desire for, allegiance to the ultimate values underpinning the social system.

The pupil is thus required to learn to want moral standards on his/her own accord and, to this effect, the Durkheimian teacher must give him/her the 'intelligence' to do so. A spirit of independence can only exist if there is such intelligence or understanding and even the feeling that, in certain circumstances of life, a moral order (or a new moral order must be created).

Durkheim was aware that moral education was faced with a dilemma—that of teaching discipline and independence at the same time. The fact is that moral behaviour is a complex matter which 'even implies opposites' and, consequently, the ideal dictated to us by morality is 'a singular combination of dependence and grandeur, submission and autonomy' (*ibid.*, p. 105).¹³ In a society based on emerging humanistic values, one of the functions of the teacher (and the teaching profession) is to reflect on pedagogical attitudes that will be conducive to this reconciliation of sometimes 'opposite' purposes, this being the end to which the process of socialization at school must lead.

The teacher/pupil relationship

Dealing with the 'pedagogical means' of education, Durkheim underscored the crucial role of the teacher as an individual, and of teachers as members of a profession and as a 'group'. As has been seen, any 'change' in the education system must be fostered primarily by teachers in order to respond to new social needs and also to the specific needs of the system. 'An ideal cannot be decreed; it must be understood, appreciated and wanted by all those whose duty it is to realize it', he wrote in *Education et sociologie*. This is why 'the major reconstruction' of education that Durkheim considered necessary in his time must be 'the work of the very profession that must reshape and reorganize itself' (p. 120).¹⁴ Building the school system is, in a sense, an ongoing process.

But the outcome of the process of instruction and education depends basically on the teacher's attitudes in relation to his/her pupils.

Implicit in the teacher's function is the ability to 'make his authority felt' and hence

the need to have a ‘deep sense of his mission’, so as to command a specific form of ‘respect’ from the pupils. It is ‘through words and gestures’ that the ‘great moral ideas of his time and of his country’, of which he is the exponent, can be transmitted from his own consciousness to that of the child; those words and those gestures must therefore be conceived by the teacher having regard to that very purpose (*L’education morale*, p. 11).¹⁵

To that effect, a ‘psychological culture’ is needed, enabling the teacher to determine the attitudes appropriate for carrying out his/her ‘mission’. Pedagogical models must take account of child psychology which informs us, for example, that the child is fundamentally neither selfish nor altruistic but ‘naturally enters into communication with others’, a quality that the teacher must know how to use. Such models must also draw on studies of groups which show how individuals in association with others spontaneously develop a collective psyche. Even experiments in hypnosis (very fashionable in Durkheim’s day) lead to a better understanding of the nature—but also the dangers—of the teacher/pupil relationship, which is not dissimilar to the relationship between the hypnotist and the person hypnotized (‘Education, its nature and role’, in: *Education et sociologie*, p. 64).

There are two particularly striking points in Durkheim’s theory: the influence of what he calls the ‘school environment’ on the social and civic education of the pupil; and the need for the teacher to strike a balance between directionless permissiveness and his/her own abuse of power.

THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

By ‘school environment’, Durkheim meant both the classroom and the establishment in which it is located. He saw it as an ‘association’, one that is more extensive than the family and less abstract than political society. Here is where ‘the habit of life in common in the class, attachment to that class and even to the school of which the class is but a part’ can be formed (*L’education morale*, p. 195).¹⁷ By making use of the child’s natural faculty of empathy, stemming from his/her need to link his/her existence to that of others, it is easy to teach him/her to ‘like collective living’ and acquire a group sense. Here, says Durkheim, there is ‘a moment, a unique point in time at which an influence can be exerted over the child that nothing can replace’ (*Ibid.*, p. 20).¹⁸ And he adds:

The whole problem consists in taking advantage of this association in which children in the same class are obliged to be, in order to give them a liking for living in a broader, more impersonal group than the one to which they are accustomed. It so happens that this is by no means an insurmountable difficulty for, in fact, there is nothing so pleasant as collective life. (...) It is a pleasure to say *we*. What must be done is to teach the child to savour this pleasure and make him feel the need for it (*Education morale*, pp. 20-04).¹⁹

But, in order to achieve this, the class must function genuinely as a group. What kind of school, what kind of class is needed to fulfil this expectation? Anticipating the later contribution of studies on the ‘classroom group’,²⁰ Durkheim outlined a conception of the class as a teacher/pupil group, a conception to which he was often to revert:

There is a special form of psychology that is of particular importance to the teacher, namely group psychology. A class is in fact a miniature society and must not be conducted as though it were merely a conglomeration of individuals independent from each other. Children in class think, feel and act differently from when they are apart. In a class there will be phenomena of contagion, demoralization, mutual excitement and healthy effervescence and these must be discerned so that they can be either prevented, countered or used, as the case may be (‘Nature and method of pedagogy’, in: *Education et sociologie*, p. 89).²¹

The teacher’s role is thus to direct the class as a group, taking into account the collective life

that is spontaneously formed within it; to multiply the circumstances in which a free elaboration of common ideas and sentiments can take place, to bring out the results, to coordinate them; to discourage the expression of 'bad feelings' and to reinforce the expressions of the others. In a word, the teacher 'must be on the look-out for everything that may cause all the children in the same class to sense their unity in a common enterprise' (*L'éducation morale*, p. 205).²² Among the 'opportunities that favour this result', Durkheim quotes a class's emotional reaction to a moving story, the assessment of a historical figure and even the drawing up in class of a 'code of precepts' to give meaning to punishments associated with school discipline.

THE TEACHER'S POWER

The 'sense of discipline' introduced at school must not be taken to mean total submission to despotic authority. The 'individualist' ideal on which the principle of 'autonomy of will' is based requires that the pupil must not be subjected to violence, or at least that the teacher is in control of a specific type of violence that Durkheim held to be inherent in the teacher/pupil relationship.

Durkheim was in fact opposed to the libertarian educators of his time who, like Tolstoy, describing his experience at Yasnaya Polyana, claimed that 'the right to educate does not exist', and that school must leave pupils 'full freedom to learn and to work things out among themselves as they see fit'.²³ Not only does such a conception of pedagogy conflict with the fundamental function of school in any society, but, above all, it fails to take account of the fact that *any* pedagogical action, even if it is non-interventionist, implies an adult/child relationship which generates a power struggle and hence 'pedagogical violence'. The problem confronting the teacher is not to have to conceal this power relation by means of permissiveness, but to be fully aware of the violence inherent in it and to be able to control it.

A passage in the thirteenth lesson of *L'éducation morale* reveals the extent to which Durkheim the sociologist knew how to use his psychological skills when speaking of pedagogy. Comparing all teacher/pupil relations to that of the relationship between a colonial power and the colonized people, he noted that in both cases contact is made between groups of individuals of unequal culture. A single 'general law' applies to both situations and may be described as follows: 'Whenever two populations, two groups of individuals, but of unequal culture, are in sustained contact, certain sentiments develop which predispose the group that is more cultivated, or believes it is, to do violence to the other'. Here, then, is the danger of an 'abuse of power', connected with the fact that the pedagogical relationship is a relationship to *knowledge*.

Between teachers and pupils there is the same disparity as between two populations of unequal culture. Indeed, there can hardly be any greater disparity between two groups of consciousness, since the one is a stranger to civilization while the other is imbued with it. And yet, by its very nature, school brings them close together and places them in constant contact with each other. (...) When one is perpetually in contact with individuals to whom one is morally and intellectually superior, how can one fail to have an inflated opinion of oneself, which is reflected in one's movements, attitudes and language? (...) In the very circumstances of school life there is, therefore, something that is conducive to violent discipline (*L'éducation morale*, pp. 162-6).²⁴

Instead of being discouraged by a feeling of helplessness, teachers should be alarmed at the extent of their power as the school system develops and becomes more organized, takes on a 'monarchic' form and in doing so heightens the danger of 'school megalomania' (ibid. p. 164).²⁵ The better the teacher is able to keep the classroom group alive, the more the school will open up to society as a whole, and the more forces there will be to counteract the risk of despotism—a risk that is proportionately greater as the pupils are younger.

Academic knowledge

School is not only a place where pupils are ‘educated’ receiving, in particular, ‘moral’ education, but also and at the same time a place where they are ‘taught’ and learn specific subjects. Durkheim’s interest in the means of achieving ‘socialization’ led him to concern himself essentially with the significance that the teaching of literature and the arts, mathematics and the natural sciences in primary and secondary schools could have.

His sweeping historical overview of educational trends in France (*L’évolution pédagogique en France*) shows how the knowledge transmitted is partly determined by the structure of a given society and also by the philosophical principles (the prevailing epistemology) underlying all branches of learning at a given period. On the other hand, and Jesuit teaching in the seventeenth century is an example, the system of scholastic knowledge has given rise to new categories of thought. Of particular interest here is Durkheim’s analysis of the controversies, and the ensuing shift in primacy, between ‘classical culture’ and ‘modern culture’ after the French Revolution and throughout the nineteenth century as a result both of scientific advances and of developments in political and religious ideologies.

In order to counteract the ‘malaise’ which he perceived in the education system of his day, Durkheim sought to elucidate the sense that children could make of lessons like ‘nature study’ and the study of man. As he saw it, the scientific knowledge transmitted must serve as an illustration of ‘human reason in activity’ and as an ‘instrument of logical culture’. Pupils must be given a sense of the complexity of things and be taught to be sceptical of facile or hasty explanations. They must, in short, be trained to be ‘rationalists’, aware of the labour behind the progress made in physics and biology:

Our aim must be to make each of our pupils not a complete scientist, but a complete reasoning being. (...) Today, we must remain Cartesians in the sense that we must train rationalists, in other words people who are intent on clear thinking, but rationalists of a new kind who know that all things, whether human or physical, are irreducibly complex, and yet who know how to face up to that complexity without flinching (*L’évolution pédagogique en France*, p. 99).²⁶

As for ‘the teaching of man’ it must not only familiarize pupils with the major literary and artistic works of the past, but, through the example set by these works, ‘convey a sense of the irreducible diversity of humanity’ and reveal the versatility and fruitfulness of human nature. We must ‘become imbued with the idea that we do not know ourselves’, that there are ‘hidden depths within us, in which there are latent, unsuspected potentialities’, whose ‘characteristics or nature’ must be brought to light. If sociology is ‘still too rudimentary to be taught at school’, history can make up for it in order to give pupils a sense of one generation’s dependence on previous generations, of the continuity of societies in the process of change, and of the role of the collective conscience or consciousness in a society (*ibid.*, p. 78).²⁷

The training of teachers

As we have seen, Durkheim looked at education and pedagogy from a sociologist’s point of view. School is a scale model in which both social relations and the relations of individuals with society are mediated through the teacher/pupil relationship and, broadly speaking, in the relationship to knowledge. In Durkheim’s scheme, the sociologist is motivated by the desire to contribute to changes leading towards greater social cohesion and the promotion of the ‘great moral ideas’ which in his view were synonymous with ‘personalist’ and democratic values. The teacher of the future is thus one who will manage to live out the pedagogical wish

of the sociologist.

While teacher training must, as Durkheim repeatedly insisted, include a ‘psychological culture’, there was no doubt in his mind that the work of sociologists could and should help teachers to have a clearer idea of their place within the educational process. By being given a grounding in sociology as part of their training, teachers should be encouraged to engage in reflection both as individuals and as a group so as to better grasp the meaning of pedagogical practices, go beyond routine and legacies of the past and become aware of the requirements of social dynamics. His course on *L'évolution pédagogique en France* was intended—this was no coincidence—for future secondary school-teachers. The aim was to instil in the would-be practitioner a ‘full awareness of his function’ and to enable him/her to see his task as a stage in a long process, that of the whole history of education which, from the sociological standpoint, becomes a genuine ‘propaedeutic to pedagogy’: through the socio-historical analysis of the development of education systems at different periods, it is possible to investigate any legacies of the past, detect recurring ills and highlight the relative autonomy of an education system in the broader context of the development of a society.

In *L'éducation morale*, as in the essays in *Education et sociologie*, Durkheim maintained that a thorough awareness of the human sciences was a necessary part of the training and the ‘pedagogical culture’ of any teacher. They could show him/her how to conduct the classroom group, control his/her own authoritarian attitudes and understand the child or adolescent. To be sure, Durkheim did not fully address the equally pedagogical problem of the training of teachers, which he saw as theoretical training, but he did put forward the idea, new at the time, that changes in education necessarily involved changes in teacher training.

On autonomy

Durkheim’s sociology placed constant emphasis on social determinants, the need to form a socialized individual and training in group discipline, but also—which may seem contradictory—on the ‘new’ needs specific to modern societies, needs consistent with the emerging conception of human rights, at the level both of the global social system and of the educational sub-system.

The concept of autonomy was central in this context. Durkheim used it, first of all, to highlight the fact that the ‘teaching profession’ may create its own pedagogical representations and in doing so influence the whole functioning of the social system. But he also used it to assert the need for the educated individual to consent or indeed to participate deliberately in the process of ensuring discipline and group affiliation. In both cases, this autonomy is only relative, since the school system is subordinate to the requirements of the social system and the socialized individual can do little more than contribute, through voluntary commitment, to the survival of his/her society.

All Durkheim’s thinking on education is in fact to be seen in the context of this two-fold relativism. Can Durkheimian pedagogy be reduced to a pedagogy of authority? Can it be considered inherently conservative? That would mean overlooking the fact that it is the duty of sociological analysis to guard against ‘simplistic’ rationalism and to bring to light the complexity of things, in which there are always latent ‘opposites’.

Although education is a ‘matter of authority’, the teacher’s authority must nevertheless be qualified to prevent school from being, or from being nothing more than, a ‘source of barbarity’.²⁸ (*L'éducation morale*, p. 157). To enable pupils to assume the autonomy that will establish them as individuals, the teacher must be aware of the risks inherent in the ‘monarchic society’ of the classroom and of his/her own ‘megalomaniac’

tendencies.

But it is particularly in the pedagogy of ‘attachment to the group’ that we discover something else, in Durkheim’s thought, something more than training in submissiveness. If we look at the chapter devoted to group attachment in *L’éducation morale* in the light of the meaning ascribed to this concept in the overall conception of social dynamics, we can see that the purpose of preparing the child for group life and of inculcating a spirit of association is to induce in the child a will to ‘manifest in a group the various forms of his activity’ including, in later life, those of the citizen. An isolated individual cannot modify the social *status quo* on his/her own—only collective forces can be pitted against collective forces. No effective action can be exerted on society unless individual forces are brought together. This is why the action for change which Durkheim urges people to undertake in order to construct ‘personalist’ society calls for concerted efforts and consultation among the social actors. Durkheim clearly explains that at school, within the natural group constituted by the class, it is possible to learn how the individual in isolation can do nothing to combat social ills and that it is therefore necessary for personal efforts to be combined, ‘to become organized in order to produce some effect’. Learning at school about the power of the individual as a member of the group therefore amounts to learning about the reforming capacity of groups, which in turn provides a response to a clearly conservative social demand.

In Durkheim’s view, this reforming capacity is a decisive factor in the promotion of a ‘personalist’ society, which is why he places emphasis on the status of the pedagogical field as a sub-system in which the future citizen learns, through trial and error, to take due account of the creative forces of the group and to experience the group values of the emerging modern society. Here we go to the heart of the Durkheimian scheme for school education, a scheme stemming from a sociologist’s wish to participate, and to secure participation by the education system, in the evolution of a changing society, and also to make teachers aware of these issues.

Influence

One of the direct consequences of Durkheim’s views on pedagogy and teacher training was the introduction, as of 1920, of a course in sociology—basically Durkheimian sociology—in the curricula of primary teacher training colleges. Two of Durkheim’s followers, members of the editorial team of the Durkheimians’ journal *L’année sociologique*, contributed to this innovation; they were Célestin Bouglé and Paul Lapie.²⁹ Their posts in the university administration system enabled them to design jointly the syllabus of ‘concepts in sociology applied to ethics and education’ and, in the face of fierce opposition, especially from religious circles, to secure its inclusion in these curricula. The lectures in general sociology and the sociology of education should, they believed, ‘convey to future teachers the principles of the functioning of social relations’. Textbooks were produced along these lines and it appears that these ‘new’ courses of study were well received by those for whom they were intended. Called into question after 19, the sociology curricula for primary school-teachers were subsequently incorporated into more general study courses on the various human sciences, and have since been opened up to the various developments in sociology.

The fact that Durkheim in effect inaugurated, under the name ‘sociology of education’, a ‘scientific’ approach to educational facts as social functions gave rise to an extensive body of literature in several countries dealing with the study of the relations between school and society, unequal opportunities and the functioning of the classroom group. In France, the views of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in their book *La reproduction* hark back in a sense to Durkheimian concepts when they refer, for example, to the social function of education (a ‘reproduction’ of the social system) or the mechanism of

socialization involved ('symbolic' violence).³⁰ The socio-historical approach adopted by Durkheim in *L'évolution pédagogique en France* has also been taken up to some extent by historians like Pierre Riché, who believes that this book is still highly relevant today.³¹

Generally speaking, however, is it appropriate to speak of Durkheim's present-day 'relevance', both sociologically and pedagogically? In today's context, a reading of Durkheim's works is bound to raise questions prompted by present-day circumstances, especially those concerning moral education. We may, of course, have some misgivings about Durkheim's faith in the ineluctable development of humanistic values in modern societies, confronted as we are with conflicts in which human rights are flouted, but the very fact that Durkheim established, if implicitly, the principle of human rights education undeniably makes his thinking relevant today. On another level, he demonstrably directed pedagogy towards the view that the class, the school environment and the teacher's attitudes are factors to be taken into account in the education process—a truth that it is still worth repeating today.

Perhaps another lesson to be drawn from the contradictions inherent in Durkheimian views on education to which we have referred (and which Durkheim himself acknowledged), for instance those concerning 'autonomy of will', is that education is no simple matter and cannot be subjected to reductionist ideologies.

Notes

1. *Jean-Claude Filloux (France)*. A philosopher by training. Took part in the founding of the University of Paris X Nanterre in 1964. Currently Emeritus Professor at the Department of Educational Sciences (University of Paris X) which he founded. Formerly professor of sociology at the University of Poitiers. Member of a number of learned societies: the Société Française de Philosophie, the Association Française de Sociologie and the Association des Enseignants et Chercheurs en Sciences de l'Éducation. His works include *La personnalité* [Personality] (1972), *Durkheim et le socialisme* [Durkheim and Socialism] (1977), *Anthologie des sciences de l'homme* [An Anthology of the Human Sciences] (1991) and numerous articles and chapters in collective works on education and on Durkheim.
2. After the proclamation of the Republic in 1875, education in France became a common ideal. The prime concerns were to establish primary education as a secular public service and to make it free and compulsory. Hence the 'fundamental laws' promulgated by the Minister Jules Ferry between 1879 and 1889. The secularization of the school system was to provide a positive foundation on which to build the unity of the national spirit. Durkheim took an active part in the debate on these issues during this crucial period.
3. It was Auguste Comte (1798-1857) who coined the word 'sociology' as part of his construction of a 'positive' philosophy. His *Cours de philosophie positive* sought to lay down the conditions for social 'consensus' through the concepts of 'order' and 'progress' and the constitution of a 'religion of humanity'. Herbert Spencer (1820-190) explicitly took as his point of departure the analogy between societies and organisms in order to postulate concepts of structure and function and analyse the development of societies and of 'institutions', drawing a distinction between a 'sustaining' system, a 'distribution' system and a 'regulative' system. He wrote his *Principles of Sociology*, a sweeping anecdotal survey of social developments, between 1876 and 1896.
4. Emile Durkheim, *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, p. 95, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1990.
5. Emile Durkheim, *Education et sociologie*, p. 51, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1992.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 122
7. Emile Durkheim, 'L'individualisme et les intellectuels', *La science sociale et l'action*, p. 271–2, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1987.
8. Emile Durkheim, '7^e leçon', *Leçons de sociologie*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1990.
9. Emile Durkheim, 'Sur la définition du socialisme', *La science sociale...*, op cit., p. 235.
10. Letter dated 6 May 1902 to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, published as an annex to the book by Georges Davy, *L'homme, le fait social et le fait politique*, Paris, Mouton, 1973.
11. Emile Durkheim, *L'éducation morale*, p. 39–42, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1992.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

13. Ibid., p. 105
14. Durkheim, *Education et sociologie*, op. cit., p. 120
15. Durkheim, *L'éducation morale*, op. cit., p. 131.
16. Durkheim, 'L'éducation, sa nature et son rôle', *Education et sociologie*, op. cit., p. 64
17. Durkheim, *L'éducation morale*, op. cit., p. 195
18. Ibid., p. 203
19. Ibid., p. 203-4
20. Studies on 'small groups', based in particular on the theories of Kurt Lewin, had an impact on the approach to the 'classroom group'. Cf. on this point Jean-Claude Filloux, 'Psychologie des groupes et étude de la classe', in M. Debesse and G. Mialaret, *Traité des sciences pédagogiques*, Vol. VI, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1974
21. Emile Durkheim, 'Nature et méthode de la pédagogie', *Education et sociologie*, op. cit., p. 89.
22. Durkheim, *L'éducation morale*, op. cit., p. 205.
23. Tolstoy is less well known for his educational work than for his literary production. The teaching experiments he conducted between 1858 and 1862 in the school he had started on his estate and the theoretical articles he wrote left an imprint on the history of education, if only for their influence on later libertarian teaching approaches. Cf. in the French translation, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Stock, Vols. XIII and XIV, 'Sur l'instruction du peuple' and 'La liberté dans l'école'; and also: Dominique Maroger, *Les idées pédagogiques de Tolstoï*, Lausanne, Ed. L'Age d'Homme, 1974.
24. Durkheim, *L'éducation morale*, op. cit., p. 205.
25. Ibid., p. 164.
26. Emile Durkheim, *L'évolution pédagogique en France*, p. 399, Paris, Presses Universitaire de France, 1990.
27. Ibid., p. 378.
28. Durkheim, *L'éducation morale*, op. cit. p. 157.
29. Célestin Bouglé (1870-1940) was one of the most influential members in the team of Durkheim's followers. He wrote two books, *Les idées égalitaires* (Paris, Alcan, 1899) and *Essais sur le régime des castes* (Paris, Alcan, 1908). His career as a university professor took him to the Sorbonne and then into university administration as the Director of the Ecole Normale Supérieure.
 Paul Lapie was also a member of the Durkheimian team of contributors to *L'année sociologique*; he carried out the first known research on 'the psychological and social determinants of success and failure at school', and published several books, including *L'école et les écoliers* (Paris, Alcan, 192) and *Pédagogie française* (Paris, Alcan, 1920). He was Director of Primary Education from 1918 to 1925 and then Rector of the Académie de Paris (Board of Education) until his death in 1927.
 On Bouglé and Lapie, cf. the articles by W. Logue, 'Sociologie et politique: le libéralisme de Célestin Bouglé'; M. Cherkaoui, 'Les effets sociaux de l'école selon Paul Lapie'; and R. Geiger, 'La sociologie dans les écoles normales primaires: histoire d'une polémique', all three of them published in 'Les Durkheimiens', *Revue française de sociologie* (Paris), Vol. XX, No. 1, 1979.
30. P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, *La reproduction*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1970.
31. P. Riché, *Les écoles et l'enseignement dans l'occident chrétien*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1970.

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Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse. 1912; new edition: Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1990.

Leçons de sociologie. Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1990. (Lectures given in 1898-1900).

La science sociale et l'action. Introduced by J.-C. Filloux. Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1987. (A collection of essays published from 1888 to 1908.)

B. Educational sociology and pedagogy

Education et sociologie. Introduction by Paul Fauconnet. 1922. (Comprises the following articles: 'L'éducation, sa nature, son rôle'; 'Nature et méthode de la pédagogie', both taken from F. Buisson, *Nouveau Dictionnaire de pédagogie*, 1911; 'Pédagogie et sociologie' (inaugural lecture on the creation of the chair at the Sorbonne, 1902); 'L'enseignement secondaire en France' (inaugural lecture in the course for candidates for the *Agrégation* (highest competitive examination for teachers, 1904). Completely new edition: Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1992.

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