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solidarity, mechanical and organic

Anne M. Hornsby

French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) coined the terms mechanical and organic solidarity to describe two types of social organization, that is, ways in which individuals are connected to each other and how they identify with the groups and societies in which they live. Social solidarity is a state of unity or cohesion that exists when people are integrated by strong social bonds and shared beliefs and also are regulated by well developed guidelines for action (values and norms that suggest worthy goals and how people should attain them). In his first book, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim argued that social solidarity takes different forms in different historical periods and varies in strength among groups in the same society. However, reflecting the popularity of social evolutionary thought in the late nineteenth century, Durkheim summarized all historical forms of solidarity into a traditional–modern dichotomy. Mechanical solidarity is a simple, pre industrial form of social cohesion and organic solidarity is a more complex form that evolves in modern societies.

In developing his mechanical–organic distinction, Durkheim drew on the organicist thinking that influenced many intellectuals of his generation, where human societies are analyzed with analogies to biological organisms. A single cluster of embryonic cells, where each cell is initially identical in structure and function, develops by dividing into separate clusters with cells changing form and specializing into kidney cells, skin cells, etc. Over time they form organs that have distinct boundaries but must be interdependent for the functioning of the whole organism. By analogy, settlements of small kinship groups are scattered across territories and organized similarly. Over time these simple societies disappear as rural and urban areas emerge, cities grow, and a complex division of functions appears within cities.

Specifically, mechanical solidarity occurs in small, simple organisms, where people live in small groups and each group is likely to perform all the functions needed to survive (familial, economic, political, religious, etc.). There is no specialization or differentiation of function. Each person feels and lives a similar connection to group life because everyone's experience of the world comes from a religiously based common culture that reproduces in each person the same ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. By mechanical, Durkheim does not mean machine like or artificial. He means that the conditions of life are the same for everyone so there is little diversity in people's experiences and ideas. Individuals do not have a sense of identity separate from being a member of a family, clan, or a warrior caste. Consequently, "the ideas and tendencies common to all the members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those which pertain personally to each member" (Durkheim 1964: 129).

Organic solidarity occurs in complex organisms composed of specialized parts, each of which performs distinct functions to support the whole. No one household, neighborhood, town, or economy can produce everything its members need to survive. Economies begin to depend not only on the family but also on educational institutions to produce dependable workers with a range of needed skills. A complex division of labor has developed, where there are many different occupations, a great diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds, and a wide range of religious beliefs and political views. Such diversity of people, groups, and institutions is organized into distinct yet interdependent roles and functions. Moreover, a cultural concept of the individual and individualism emerges, and people are integrated by social exchange among free individuals in market economies.

Durkheim grew up as the son of a rabbi in the long established and tightly knit Jewish community of Alsace Lorraine. He left his traditional world to pursue his studies in the cosmopolitan world of Paris. Many scholars have observed that Durkheim's personal experiences of tradition and modernity inspired his lifelong interest in the nature and condition of solidarity in contemporary democratic society. The central question Durkheim posed in *The Division of Labor* is what is the basis of social solidarity in modern societies where there is a great diversity of people living in vastly different settings? How do the parts of a modern society (individuals, groups, institutions) become more interdependent while at the same time becoming more distinct from each other?

His argument is summarized in a well known statement: "Social life comes from a double source, the likeness of consciences and the division of labor" (Durkheim 1964: 226). Here, Durkheim identifies the two key variables that distinguish mechanical and organic solidarity, which continue to be important variables in sociology today: (1) the extent (degree of complexity) of the division of labor, by which he means differentiation of distinct functions or roles, such as the historical separation of economic production from family and kinship systems, and the organization of economic production into differentiated occupational groupings and industries; (2) the extent to which members of a society share a collective consciousness (i.e., all the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are common to a group or society). (The extent of collective consciousness means the number and intensity of the values, beliefs, norms, emotions, and activities that are shared.)

In mechanically organized societies the division of labor is absent or weak, and the collective consciousness contains a large number of clear, powerful beliefs, values, and traditional practices shared intensely by all members. In contrast, organic societies have a complex division of labor and a smaller number of more ambiguous and thus less constraining ideas and practices that everyone shares. A complex division of labor and great diversity of people creates the condition where the collective consciousness becomes more abstract by virtue of including only values and norms that are meaningful to everyone. Durkheim notes that perhaps the only value widely shared and strongly held in modern western societies is individualism – the inherent dignity, worth, and freedom of the individual. As the collective consciousness becomes more abstract because shared ways of thinking, feeling, and acting are far fewer in number and are more ambiguous, society is less able to regulate all behavior.

Exactly how does the evolution from mechanical to organic solidarity occur? Durkheim argues that physical and social density increase, which generates competition among people, resulting in differentiation of roles and institutional functions. Population size increases and is distributed across a territory differently due to improvements in transportation and communication that link people and villages more easily. Villages and towns grow, cities emerge, and as urbanization increases, each person has more contact with a great many more people. This increase in social density – the actual pattern of who interacts with whom, how, and with what frequency – stimulates competition for jobs and other resources. From competition emerges a more complex division of labor, where people find occupational niches, firms find market niches, and different zones of a city specialize in different functions.

In short, social ties are based on difference instead of likeness. Everyone is more interdependent, in worlds separated yet linked by specialization. Durkheim concludes that "even where society relies most completely upon the division of labor . . . the members are united by ties which extend deeper and far beyond the short moments during which the exchange is made. Each of the functions that they exercise is, in a fixed way, dependent upon others, and with them forms a solidary system" (Durkheim 1964: 227).

In *The Division of Labor* Durkheim argued that as specialization and interdependence of function increase, the extent and intensity of collective consciousness recede in importance as a source of social solidarity. Together, both changes produce a different type of society. In subsequent work, however, Durkheim became less convinced that the collective consciousness recedes in importance in modern societies. Over time his work focused more on the pre rational basis of solidarity (i.e, the moral and emotional

effect of social ties), especially how groups pro duce ideologies through mechanisms such as ritual practices (Collins 1994: 190, 204). Dur kheim did not discuss mechanical and organic solidarity per se after *The Division of Labor*. Yet over his lifetime he continued his interest in both manifestations of the structural relations among people: the evolution of institutions and the symbolic and emotional components of social life that unify groups and societies.

SEE ALSO: Collective Consciousness; Division of Labor; Durkheim, Émile; Durkheim, Émile and Social Change; Norms; Tradition; Values

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Sombart, Werner (1863–1941)

Alan Sica

Werner Sombart was born in the small Protes tant town of Ermsleben (Harz region) and died in Berlin, an event fully recorded in the *New York Times* with obituary and editorial (May 20 and 22, 1941). His father, Anton Ludwig Sombart, was from seventeenth century Huguenot stock and personified what Sombart's friend Max Weber would call in 1905 the Protestant ethic, and what Sombart himself named the bourgeois spirit. The elder Sombart was elected *Burgerme ister* of Ermsleben in 1848, and became rich as an industrialist and estate owner through the sugar trade. Not satisfied simply to enjoy his wealth, he co founded the famous *Verein fur Sozialpoli tik*, an influential organization of concerned citi zens that sponsored social research prescribing government policy, particularly pertaining to the liberation of agricultural workers from vir tual serfdom on large estates. Bismarck invited him to become minister of agriculture, but he declined owing to poor eyesight.

Despite his own eye disease and nascent tuberculosis in youth, Werner Sombart was able to use his family's great wealth to study econom ics and humanities at Pisa (1882), Berlin (1893), and Rome. His Berlin dissertation on the ancient Roman *Campagna* (1888) (substantively similar to Weber's) was directed by Gustav Schmoller, the leading exponent of sociohistorical econom ics. It remains an impressive scholarly achieve ment by virtue of the way primary documents from the Roman state archives were examined. Sombart's first professional position was as a city lawyer for Bremen, which he was loath to leave after 2 years when offered a professorship (partly through the machinations of his father) at remote Breslau in 1890. (Max Weber unsuc cessfully applied for the very position in Bremen which Sombart had vacated.)

Sombart's first classes treated the Communist Manifesto and *Capital* (Vol. 1), to which he had been drawn after becoming radicalized, not by reading social science, but instead the fiction of Emile Zola. He decided at this early date to commit his prodigious scholarly energy to the study of the proletariat and the nature of capit alism as they evolved in unison throughout his tory. Like today's sociologists, he toured worksites in order to understand the proletar ian's plight, a practice which did not sit well with his hidebound academic colleagues, who already regarded him as "a young and conceited person." Thus, from this unusual background of familial wealth and connections, childhood disease and poor early school performance, wide travel, and passionate interests in literature, eco nomics, and history, plus the usual linguistic capacity of mandarins of his period, Sombart perfected a style of living and writing which throughout his life shocked his staid peers while thrilling readers and auditors. He was known as