

Sociology and Pedagogy. On the Establishment of Sociology as a Moral Science by Émile Durkheim

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Sociologie a pedagogika. O založení sociologie jakožto morální vědy Émilem Durkheimem

Abstract: In his sociology, Émile Durkheim has not only dealt extensively with the subject of education, but pedagogy has also a special significance for the establishment of his sociology. On the one hand, this applies to his attempt to establish sociology at French universities and establish it as an independent research discipline. And on the other hand, this applies to his attempt to use his sociology as a moral science to present a crisis analysis of French society and contribute to its solution.

Keywords: morality and society; crisis analysis; education and socialization; practical theory; educational sociology; sociology as a moral science

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1. Introduction

In the sociological context, education is not only a topic of educational sociology, but it can also refer to a long history in general sociology, and there especially in sociological theory and social analysis [see Kurtz 2007a]. For contemporary sociology, one might think, for example, of the extensive studies on the educational system of society by Niklas Luhmann [see Kurtz 2003], of the studies of sociological neo-institutionalism on the assimilation of education in world society, or education within the framework of sociological inequality research by Pierre Bourdieu. But one can also go back further in the history of sociology – for example to Talcott Parsons, who, building on a synthesis of classical sociological knowledge, founded a sociological theory from which all subsequent theories had to strive to distance themselves, and who, in his social analysis, repeatedly emphasized that it was particularly the revolution in education that had become structurally decisive for modern society [see for example Parsons 1970: 220]. If one goes back even further, to the phase of the establishment of sociology as an autonomous science, then one can actually only think of one author who, as a sociologist, has dealt with the subject of education in detail – *Émile Durkheim*.

Durkheim has entered the sociological textbooks as one of the classics of the discipline. Since sociology was not a university subject at that time, he devoted up to two-thirds of his teaching to pedagogy or the sociological analysis of education.¹ Thus he began

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¹ And so Durkheim is not wrongly called “the founder of educational sociology” [Ottaway 1955/6: 223]. However, one also finds the certainly somewhat exaggerated remark that he was more of an educator than a sociologist [for example, Pickering 1979: 101], although one could, of course, assume that he tended to educate society.

teaching social science and education in Bordeaux in 1887 – several years before the publication of his first major work *De la division du travail social* of 1893 – and in 1906 he was appointed to a chair of education as successor to Ferdinand Buisson at the Sorbonne in Paris, which was only renamed *Educational Science and Sociology* (Science de l'Éducation et Sociologie) in 1913 after repeated insistence on his part. However, in the pedagogical field, Durkheim left behind, in addition to a few essays and smaller articles in handbooks – which were compiled in 1922 in the anthology *Éducation et sociologie* by Paul Fauconnet, the collaborator and successor of Durkheim at the Sorbonne [Durkheim 2005a/1922] – only the two lecture series *L'éducation morale* and *L'évolution pédagogique en France* [Durkheim 2005b/1925, 1938], which were published posthumously after a delay of several decades.

In this article, we will focus less, or only marginally, on the significance of Durkheim's sociology for pedagogical theory (in France), but rather on the role that Durkheim's pedagogical studies and, more generally, the theme of education have played in the formulation of his societal analysis. For Durkheim essentially pursued two goals, and in both of them, the educational theme plays a not inconsiderable role. On the one hand, he generally tried to establish sociology at French universities and formulate it as an independent research discipline. On the other hand, his entire work is characterized by the desire to present an analysis of the crisis in French society and contribute to its solution, which is why he specifies sociology as a particular form of moral science. And although Durkheim did not plan it this way, his moral sociology finds its preliminary conclusion only in his pedagogical writings, so that the lecture *L'éducation morale* held at the Sorbonne in 1902/1903 has remained his moral-sociological legacy.

2. Sociology as an Autonomous Science

Particularly in the phase of its establishment, sociology had to find its own form to describe the topics anew already worked on by other disciplines. That is also evident, for example, in Durkheim's outside description of education and pedagogy. To this day, sociology differs significantly from the disciplines of education, political science, law, and economics in its observer perspective. These social sciences are *theories of reflection* in the form of a self-description foil as theories *of the system within the system*. Accordingly, they are themselves part of the respective function systems that they observe, describe, and designate in theory form [see Luhmann 1997: 958–983; Kurtz 2007b: 285–286]. In contrast, sociology adopts an external observer's perspective and prepares outside descriptions of what the reflection theories of function systems have already presented as self-descriptions. In this respect, sociology describes a reality that has always been described by other theories [Touraine 1974; Bauman 2000], but without committing itself in advance to a positive reference to the system to be described.

In the founding phase of sociology as an autonomous science, Georg Simmel probably most clearly put the aspect of sociological outside description into words. For him, most sociological studies of the time belong “to one of the existing sciences, for there is no content of life that is not already the object of such a science” [Simmel 1992/1898: 311 – own translation]. And sociology, for him, is “an eclectic science since the products of other sciences constitutes its material. It deals with the results of historical research,

anthropology, statistics, psychology as with semi-products; it does not directly address the primitive material that other sciences work with, but, as a science of second potence, so to speak, it creates new syntheses from what for them is already synthesis. In its present state, it only gives a new standpoint for the consideration of known facts” [Simmel 1989a/1890: 116 – own translation]. Besides Simmel, however, Durkheim was also anxious to find a role for the new discipline of sociology in the scientific system, and in doing so he also sees himself confronted with the problem that sociology, in the first place, does not have any new topics, but only a new approach.

In his first major work, *The Structure of Social Action*, Talcott Parsons attempted to present Durkheim’s theory as a process of development and to differentiate it into four periods [see Parsons 1968a: 304], beginning with the formulation of the fundamental problem in his first major work *De la division du travail sociale* from 1893, followed by the second phase, in which he established the theoretical substrate of his sociology, so to speak, in *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* from 1894/95 and exemplified it with empirical phenomena in his lectures on *Le socialisme* (1895/96) and the study *Le suicide* from 1897. Subsequently, Durkheim concentrated in the third phase on establishing sociology as a *moral science*, with a strong emphasis on pedagogy. Finally, in the last phase of his intellectual work, he turned to new empirical areas, especially religion, building on the systematic theory he had developed up to that point. Of course, one can criticize this chronological order, and Parsons himself, contrary to the introductory announcement, had also, in his remarks, removed the chronology of the first two phases and treated the topics of suicide and socialism under the title *Early Empirical Work* together with the topic division of labor. What he overlooked, however, is that Durkheim did not, of course, begin formulating his sociological method only after the *Division of labor*, but that this book is framed, as it were, by two methodological works; on the one hand, the well-known *Rules* and, on the other, his little-noticed first dissertation on Montesquieu from 1892 [Durkheim 1992a/1892], written in Latin.

Before the next part of this article can begin with the moral theme – which nevertheless does not only appear in Durkheim’s pedagogical lectures at the turn of the century but also determines his explanations in the books on the division of labor and suicide – a few remarks on the general foundation of sociological science in Durkheim’s work are briefly advanced.² For in order to establish a science, first of all, an independent method is needed and then one’s topics or a new approach to old topics.³

The question of what sociology is, Durkheim explains in summary in *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*. Sociology is defined by him here as “the science of institutions, their genesis and mode of action” [Durkheim 1950a/1895: XXII – own translation], whereby the term institution is defined so broadly that it includes all *social facts*.⁴ Durkheim defines a social fact as “any more or less defined type of action that has the capacity to exert an external constraint on the individual; or that occurs in the realm of a given society in

² On the differentiation of the new discipline of sociology, see in summary the two articles by Durkheim [2009/1900] and [1970a/1909].

³ See also Durkheim [1992a/1892]; especially the first and fifth chapters.

⁴ In a certain sense, Durkheim’s social facts are also sociological facts. For if one includes the observer, then these facts exist first of all for the sociological observer as sociological facts. In this sense, see in relation to Luhmann’s theory of social systems also the considerations of Baecker [2016].

general, with a life of its own independent of its individual expressions”⁵ Building on this, he elaborates a differentiated model of his scientific method, whereby social facts should firstly be viewed fundamentally like things, secondly be objectively definable in distinction to individual actions, and thirdly, Durkheim emphasizes the sociological character of his method and postulates sociology as an autonomous science that is not a branch of psychology, for only in this way can sociology adequately analyze society: Durkheim defines society not only as the sum of individuals but it represents a specific reality, a phenomenon *sui generis*.

Durkheim’s method deliberately wanted to be very similar to that of the natural sciences. Whether this shortened the sociology path to the Sorbonne, which was dominated by the natural sciences and literature, cannot be clearly answered. In any case, Durkheim’s sociology was initially viewed very critically in France of the Third Republic because the “sociologists threw the tools of literary education overboard without ever being able to achieve the exactitude of the natural sciences” [*Lepenies 2002: 78* – own translation]. With his basic methodological principle of explicating social only by social⁶, Durkheim was in any case, anxious to establish sociology as an independent, autonomous science with a *sui generis* object in the French scientific landscape, namely as a causally explanatory science and practical moral theory in one.

The method of sociology prescribed in the *Rules* is not only exemplified in the following years, among others in the lecture series on socialism and *Le suicide* but is also already illustrated in the *Division of labor* of 1893. This book can be regarded as the first attempt at a theory of differentiation of society, for it is not only about the economic dimension as in the Scottish tradition or the relationship between the division of labor and social inequality as in the German tradition, but Durkheim is concerned with the societal function of the division of labor, with the fact that it functions as a structural principle in all areas of society. However, this was still a theory of differentiation without the term ‘differentiation’. In 1977, in the foreword to the first German edition of this work, Niklas Luhmann had already asked himself why Durkheim was using the term ‘division of labor’ rather than ‘differentiation’ [see *Luhmann 1988a: 23–24*]. There may have been several reasons for this [see *Tyrell 1985*]. First, there are theory-policy reasons, i.e., Durkheim tried to show a conceptual connection to Comte and, at the same time, a distance to Spencer. On the other hand, there were reasons related to his discipline, because in order to establish sociology at the universities with its own object and method, he also had to set up conceptual demarcations from other sciences such as biology.⁷

And this approach of approaching a known topic differently, i.e., sociologically, is particularly evident in the study on suicide. Durkheim is not concerned there with the investigation of individual suicide, but rather with societal analysis in contrast to psychology; the

⁵ Durkheim [1950a/1895: 14; original italics – own translation]. Critically, Parsons [1968a: 353] notes that Durkheim’s category of social facts was initially only a “residual category”, whereby everything that cannot be reduced to the physical tools of the individual or the natural environment was subsumed under the concept of social facts.

⁶ While König [1978: 140], sees in it almost the beginning of all sociology as an independent science, Tarde [2009/1898: 93–94], for example, had critically questioned the exclusion of the individual from the sociological explanation from the beginning.

⁷ See for the importance of biology for Durkheim Guillo [2006].

actual object of investigation of this study is the *social* suicide rate⁸, with which the societal conditionality of individual behavior could be shown.

3. The Moral Problem

For Durkheim, the basic statement of sociology as an independent science is that social can only be explained by social, and so he, first of all, strives to define as many objects as possible as social objects, or to find social causes for individual behavior, as he did exemplarily in *Le suicide* [Durkheim 1969/1897]. And of course, this also applies to education. While the pedagogy of his time, derived from psychology, concentrated on the individual, Durkheim had increasingly emphasized the social aspect of education.⁹ And since for him the goals of education and the attainment of these goals are social, it is only logical that he endeavored to formulate pedagogy as a science through sociology, establishing sociology as the basic science for social and educational action.¹⁰ In any case, this has led to the paradoxical situation in France, where the pedagogy already established in the universities has had to help its own scientific reference discipline, sociology, to become a university discipline, and then theoretically benefit from it.

Émile Durkheim wanted to establish sociology that was “at once rationally transparent, empirically provable, and morally binding” [Jonas 1980: 32 – own translation]. In this sense, he not only described society sociologically but also tried to intervene with his sociology, which he formulated as a moral science. Durkheim observed an increasing softening of the social order in French society at the time of the Third Republic and marked the starting point first of all in the collapse of France before the German armies in 1870/71.¹¹ However, he does not so much attribute the consequences of this defeat to the political defeat, but rather more compellingly to the moral burdens that reached into the everyday morals of individuals and which even the Third Republic, proclaimed in 1872, could not master. The last years of the 19th century were characterized by political conflicts that took on ever more acute forms, which escalated into a *moral crisis*, and the most public expression of this was the *Dreyfus Affair*, in which the Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus was falsely accused and convicted of espionage for the German Empire. Among many other French intellectuals, Durkheim was “moved to political action by the Dreyfus affair, in which he saw a direct challenge to the values on which the Third Republic rested” [Logue 1983: 152]. In the Dreyfus affair, Durkheim stood on the side of critical intellectuals. For him, the affair symbolized the moral crisis in which French society found itself in

⁸ However, Maurice Halbwachs had already asked himself whether all individualistic factors could be neglected; see Halbwachs [1930].

⁹ See Durkheim [2005c/1903]. This text is Durkheim’s inaugural lecture at the Sorbonne and also the first lecture in the lecture series *L’éducation morale*, which was published separately in the January 1903 edition of the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*.

¹⁰ See Durkheim [2005c/1903]; and for the scientific foundation of pedagogy Bouglé [1904].

¹¹ Some French education policy-makers have reinterpreted the French defeat as a victory for the German elementary school teacher, which is why they demanded patriotism from the French school in general in order to strengthen the unity of the nation, and whose application of this postulate found in the constitution of a new school subject: civic education (*éducation civique*).

the transition from a traditional to a modern industrial society, as he had already pointed out introductory in his study on the division of labor.¹²

Among other things, he seeks an answer to the question of how a morally guided mode of life can still be possible in modern society [see Müller 1992: 58]. He sees the main evil from which society suffers not in an increase in economic misery, but in “an alarming state of our morality” [Durkheim 1969/1897: 445 – own translation]. In this context, he describes anomie as a chronic phenomenon of economic life and fixates the problem of society in the lack of fit between the egoisms of individuals and the general interest of the state. And unlike with the professions, Durkheim criticizes the absence of *professional morality* in the entire field of economics [see Durkheim 1950b/1937: 15], which he marks as a problem because, without economic discipline, public morality would also deteriorate [see Durkheim 1930/1902: V]. His proposed solution, which he had already considered in the final part of his study *Le suicide*, published in 1897, and then finally elaborated in the lecture *L'éducation morale* of 1902/3 given at the Sorbonne, is that the desired change in the world should be initiated through moral education and completed in the professional groups [see Kurtz 2005: 22–26].

Education here has the function of training the new morality already in the child, and it is precisely for this purpose that for Durkheim, the training of teachers at universities must draw on the findings of sociological moral science. His sociology as a moral science, with the postulates for education derived from it and the demand for professional groups, also in the economic sphere, is thus essentially to be understood as a way of overcoming the moral crisis of French society. With his scientific description of the moral problem, he linked direct practical action significance [see Durkheim 1976/1901: 184], and in the final section of *Le suicide* he then began to work out a therapeutic concept for the modern society based essentially on the moral-generating potency of professional groups.¹³ The professional groups should thereby contribute to a “decentralization of moral life” [Durkheim 1950b/1937: 12 – own translation], because only with this *professional decentralization* could one create “many new centers of community life without jeopardizing the unity of the nation” [Durkheim 1969/1897: 449 – own translation]. For him, the profession, and especially the professional group with its moral condensation, functions as a mediating link between individuals and society; in professional corporations, the set of rules that society lacks is to be formed, and thus societal anomie-tendencies are to be counteracted.

But it was not until 1898 – i.e., after the completion of the suicide work – that Durkheim began to formulate a systematic theory with a focus on moral science and the pedagogy derived from it, thus elaborating the earlier approaches to a degree, and whose theoretical substrate is found in particular in the lecture series *L'éducation morale*. Thus, Hans Joas, for example, had defined the work of Émile Durkheim as a continued attempt “to answer the question of the emergence of a new morality” [Joas 1992: 77 – own translation], more

¹² On Durkheim's position in the Dreyfus Affair, see also Durkheim [1970b/1898] and Rol – Merlié [2013], based on previously unpublished letters from him. But Durkheim does not see himself as a true Dreyfusard, because for him, as a Jew, “the real France is not anti-Semitic” [Abbott 2019: 27]. For an overview of the Dreyfus Affair, see also Blum [1935]; and with links to the present day Begley [2009].

¹³ See Durkheim [1969/1897: 434–444]. And especially in the preface to the second edition of *Division of labor* of 1902 [Durkheim 1930/1902: I–XXXVI] and in his lectures on professional morality [Durkheim 1950b/1937], he expands his reflections from *Le suicide* to an essential aspect of his sociology, understood as a moral science.

precisely the replacement of a religious morality by a secular one. This series of lectures has remained Durkheim's main work in moral science, which has been preserved for posterity. The *Division of labor*, the *Rules* and *Le suicide* can – at least in retrospect – be interpreted as preliminary stages on the basis of which Durkheim further elaborates his systematic theory of a sociological moral science in *L'éducation morale*. In addition to the pedagogical lecture series and his major works, Durkheim also continued to deal with the moral theme – and did so until the end of his life – for example, in a lecture series held several times since 1896 in Bordeaux and Paris under different titles, which was not published posthumously in France until 1950 under the not very fortunate title *Leçons de sociologie*.¹⁴ And finally, in 1917, he began his *Introduction à la morale*, planned as a major work in moral sociology, but did not complete it due to his early death.¹⁵

4. Education and Sociology

The lecture series *L'éducation morale* was written and held at a time when the France of the Third Republic “was deeply embroiled in an internecine battle between church and state that ended with their separation in 1906” [Vogt 1982: 29], but the dispute between the two institutions over their influence on moral education continued. Until 1870 – a good one hundred years longer than in Germany – the French school system was determined by the church¹⁶, and it was not until 1875 that a public school system was established in France, with the task of providing national education for the masses, which was then extended to the universities.¹⁷ In this context, Durkheim's attempt to establish his sociology explicitly as a moral science in the French academic system, with the postulate of applying it to teacher training in support of the Third Republic, must also be understood. Thus, in the second half of the 19th century, there was a conflict between the church and the state, or more precisely, a fight by the Catholic Church against the state's monopoly on teaching, created by the inclusion of the primary system. In this context, the school system was generally reformed. In the elementary school sector, the gratuité was generalized¹⁸, compulsory education was extended, the laïcité for the state primary school system was realized, and since the reforms of the Third Republic, equality has been the guiding principle of primary school work. At the organizational level, the consequence was the establishment

¹⁴ See Durkheim [1950c]. In this series of lectures he outlined, so to speak, “the moral infrastructure of a modern society” [Müller 2009: 243 – own translation].

¹⁵ See Durkheim [1920]. This discipline is usually referred to as the “science or physics of morals”, while Durkheim envisions a “science of morals or science of moral phenomena”, which “should grasp the moral rules in their purity and impersonality” [Durkheim 1920: 96 – own translations]. While Georg Simmel, for example, already at the beginning of his scientific career presented a large-scale two-volume *Introduction to the science of morality*, comprising almost 900 pages [see Simmel 1989b/1892, 1991/1893], Durkheim's work boils down to the no longer performed “Introduction à la morale”.

¹⁶ On the consequences for education, see Logue [1983: 76–77]. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there was no longer any church influence on Germany's school system, because at least until 1918 apart from private schools, the education system here was state-run but still denominationally bound and under partial church supervision.

¹⁷ Cf. also Lapie [1901: 657], who states that the stability of science is added to the morals at the university. Fournier [2007: 15–16], called the France of the time a teacher's republic (République des professeurs), and Collins [2014: 671], concludes: Durkheim's “courses on sociology of education are the only required courses at the Sorbonne, for those who intend to become teachers – which is to say, almost everyone”.

¹⁸ On this, see also the reasoning in Buisson [1933: 52].

of the *école laïque*, which replaced religious instruction with moral instruction in French primary schools.¹⁹

And so Durkheim, too, concentrated on *laic-moral education* in his lectures on pedagogy, which were held at regular intervals from 1887 onwards and were primarily aimed at training future secondary school teachers, in addition to an introduction to the history of educational institutions.²⁰ The focus of his educational sociology was thus not the school lessons themselves, but rather the global problems of sense and reflection of the educational system. Durkheim defines education essentially as preparation for life in society and the respective milieu [see *Durkheim 2005d/1911*]. For him, education consists in a planned socialization of one generation by the other – the younger by the older – and thus education and socialization are synonymous terms for Durkheim.²¹ Education should convey reality, i.e., it should bring the adolescent generation closer to the morality that is adequate to the respective status quo of society, so that Durkheim essentially limited himself in the process of socialization to conveying collective norms and values because these are the decisive moment for restoring social cohesion in a society threatened by anomie. And so he explicates sociology as the basic science for social and educational, i.e., practical action. It is the theory from which pedagogical action is to be derived [cf. *Krisam 1972: 9*], and consequently, from Durkheim's point of view, pedagogy is a sociological discipline – i.e., one that is subordinate to sociology – because education is “a highly social thing, both in its origins and in its functions” [*Durkheim 2005c/1903: 92* – own translation]. That is quasi the central idea of his educational theory.

Building on the thesis from *Division of labor* that in every human individual there are two modes of consciousness, that of the individual personality and that of society as a whole [cf. *Durkheim 1930/1902: 73–74*], he arrives in his pedagogical lectures at the expanded differentiation between the two beings existing in every person: the individual and the social being. By the individual being, he means the states of mind related to the individual, and the social being comprises the collective ideas, feelings, and habits of religion, morality, and tradition. In his sociologically inspired theory of education, he then elevates the formation of the social being exclusively to the object of this theory [see *Durkheim 2005c/1903: 102*], which for him is an image of the evolution of the social being in society [see *Durkheim 1950a/1895: 8*], and this because “the realm of morality begins where the social realm begins” [*Durkheim 2005b/1937: 96* – own translation]. The task of moral education is then to bind the child to the social group primarily surrounding it – the family – and thus to prepare the child to join other social groups, such as the professional group. Ultimately, Durkheim's point is that individuals should contribute to society's social order by conveying and appropriating the norms and values of the social community.

If Durkheim defines sociology as the basic science for social and educational action, it is also because the pedagogy of his time is not yet a science in his sense, but a *théorie*

¹⁹ For the genesis of this type of school, see Lapie [1927].

²⁰ In laic-moral education, the term *laic* meant the rejection of religious content that had previously dominated the educational system and negated the religious system that produced educational achievements. In contrast, the term *moral* meant a relativization of negation through the moralization of religion since the inclusion of the population's denominationally bound strata was also to be guaranteed.

²¹ Today, one would rather differentiate and follow Luhmann, who distinguished between intentional education and non-intentional socialization [see *Luhmann 1987*].

pratique: the practical theory of education.²² In his introductory lecture on laic morality at the Sorbonne, Durkheim states in this sense that although education is not yet a science, it is already more than just an art²³, and stands between the two. And so the formulation of the *théorie pratique* is conceived as a transitional solution, which, in contrast to the abstract educational science he has in mind as an ideal, is not formulated as a scientific – knowledge-generating – theory, but as a theory that guides action. In a nutshell, he characterizes the *théorie pratique* as follows: “It does not study educational systems in a scientific way, but reflects on them in order to provide the activity of the educator with guiding ideas” [Durkheim 2005e/1911: 79 – own translation].

This practical theory of education remains fundamentally rooted in existence; it offers no categorical knowledge, develops no new terminology, but remains in the realm of existentialia, it is not a scientific theory, but a theory that guides action, which appears as an intermediate theory between science and educational practice. It is the – in contrast to science – methodologically hardly controllable reflection applied to educational phenomena with the intention of controlling the development [see Durkheim 2005e/1911: 81]. The *théorie pratique* is, so to speak, what Niklas Luhmann and Karl Eberhard Schorr later described as the theory of the system within the system [see Luhmann – Schorr 1988; Kurtz 2000], a theory of reflection that produces dynamics rather than truth, whereby it is concerned with the practical control and reform problems of the educational system and the actors acting within it.²⁴ In the following, however, Durkheim now emphasized that one cannot stop at this action-guiding theory of education, but that only an abstract general educational science – i.e., so to speak, a distanced self-description [see Kurtz 2007c] – can make generalizable scientific statements about the forms of education. And precisely this *new* educational science that Durkheim is striving for must be sociologically underpinned. In this context, it can be seen that with Durkheim and, more broadly, with Alfred Binet’s research, which focused more on the interaction system of instruction, the transition of educational science to the empirical human and social sciences had already taken place in France around 1900 – therefore much earlier than in Germany.²⁵

²² Durkheim attempted to compensate for the theoretical problems of the emerging French educational science by using a multi-level analysis divided into four consecutive layers. The first layer is the constantly running and unreflected *educational practice*, on which the norms and values of society or a group of people are handed down; the second layer he calls the *art of education*, where the previously only unreflected educational practice is consciously and explicitly practiced and applied, i.e., expresses the behavior of the teacher and educator. While he uses the term *éducation* to describe these two layers, which follow in a more practical way, he uses the term *pédagogie* for the two following layers, which imply a more theoretical and scientific aspect [see Durkheim 2005d/1911, 2005e/1911]. The third layer, which reflects on education’s art, is the so-called *théorie pratique*, the practical theory of education, and the fourth, finally, is *general educational science*. On the scientific character of education, see also Durkheim [2005e/1911]; König [1978: 181–182]. Simmel [2004/1922: 318], also saw it this way in his *School pedagogy* that pedagogy is not yet a real science. But Durkheim goes even further here when he addresses the possibility of a general educational science inspired by sociology.

²³ Cf. Durkheim [2005b/1925: 31–32], and on this distinction already Herbart [1964a/1802: 283], who also differentiates between pedagogy as a science and the art of education.

²⁴ But it was precisely this solution, which he proposed as *théorie pratique*, that Durkheim brought in a great deal of criticism from the successor generations of French educationalists so that the only positive thing about his definition is seen in its concise brevity by Maurice Debesse [1976: 71].

²⁵ This could be interpreted as a functional equivalent of the *realistic turnaround* in the German-speaking world. In Germany, it was not until the 1960s that a fundamental change in the reference disciplines of pedagogy, from philosophy to – and theory import from – sociology and psychology, could be observed.

Although Durkheim had separated his educational theory from educational psychology for mainly disciplinary reasons, he was not interested, as Parsons pointed out, in a complete separation from psychology in questions of education, but rather in a collaboration between sociology and (social) psychology. “His work in this field is a monument to the thesis that no satisfactory theory of education, as many other social phenomena, can be developed without the contribution at strategically important places of several disciplines, in this case notably *both* sociology and psychology. Durkheim set a model for the general framework of that collaboration, which to this day is one of the best we have” [Parsons 1968b: 10]. And yet, as Paul Fauconnet points out, Durkheim has repeatedly emphasized the distinction from psychology. “In order to study education scientifically as a fact accessible to observation, sociology must cooperate with psychology. Under one of these two aspects, educational science is a sociological science. It was under this angle that Durkheim approached it” [Fauconnet 1922: 192 – own translation]. For before his time, education was considered an exclusively individual object since pedagogy resulted solely from psychology, and it was believed that in child development, only active forces were realized that existed in the prenatal state of individuals.²⁶ On the other hand, Durkheim argues that education is dependent on the respective social structure [see Durkheim 1969/1897: 427–428]. “Man is in fact only human because he lives in society.”²⁷ And so, for Durkheim, the training of the social being in the child is a reflection of the evolution of the social being in society, whereby education is intended to put into practice the ideal that society prescribes to individuals.

In summary, it can be stated here that knowledge transfer processes play only a subordinate role in Durkheim’s work. He concentrates entirely on educational and socialization processes, without clearly distinguishing between the two, and in contrast to French pedagogy, he has externally described education with a sociological reinterpretation – namely understood as a *social* fact – and tried to use this for a committed self-description of French society. But this definition of Durkheim as a reformer, or in other words, as an educator of society, must not be overestimated. This is only the political-moral consequence that follows from his sociological analysis of society, but of course, not its core. And so *L’éducation morale* is not only an application of his sociology but the last missing link in his moral-scientific sociology.

5. Education and Morality

In the first part of the lecture series *L’éducation morale*, Durkheim differentiates his theory of morality into the three essential elements of the spirit of discipline, the connection to social groups, and the autonomy of the will, which together constitute morality.²⁸

²⁶ “For Kant as well as for Mill, for Herbart as well as for Spencer, the object of education should above all be to bring forth in each individual the highest possible degree of perfection, that is, the constitutive qualities of the human species in general” [Durkheim 2005c/1903: 93 – own translation], whereby they presuppose the belief in a single education. However, concerning Herbart, Durkheim is mistaken here, for he had already referred in 1802 to different educational models depending on nation and age. See Herbart [1964a/1802: 285].

²⁷ Durkheim [2005d/1911: 55 – own translation]. Herbart had already assumed a strict dependence of individuals on society: “Man is nothing without society” [Herbart 1964b/1825: 16 – own translation].

²⁸ Half of his posthumously published work deals with these three fundamental elements of the moral character. Cf. Wallwork [1972: 124].

Since, for him, the goals of education are social, the means of attaining these goals must also be social. And in order to realize these goals, pedagogy must anchor the three elements of morality in the child so that Durkheim then, in the second part of the lecture series, supplements the analyses with possible forms of application orientation.²⁹

He sees the function of morality primarily in the regulation of behavior. Accordingly, morality must consist of rules that determine human behavior, and Durkheim thus states the *spirit of discipline* (*l'esprit de discipline*) as an essential characteristic of moral behavior. He justifies this, among other things, that man needs a certain degree of regimentation because otherwise, his aspirations would flow into infinity, which he had determined in *Le suicide* as a cause of anomic suicide. One of the most important forces that education must train is, therefore, the ability to control oneself – moral discipline thus also contributes to the formation of character and personality³⁰ – but in order to build internal boundaries, external boundaries must first be experienced.

Here Durkheim assigns the task of moral education to the school in particular, contrary to other views which regarded this as the task of the family.³¹ And this especially because morality always has something to do with understanding, and pre-school children would be too young for this. The family does not play a significant role in the spirit of discipline because family's relationships are more affective than rational. The spirit of discipline should be awakened in the child through *school discipline*. This “is the morality of the class, just as the actual morality is the discipline of society” [*Durkheim 2005b: 196* – own translation]. The school society is thus much closer to the society of adults than the family; for Durkheim, the school is a social microcosm in which the preferred norms and values are transmitted and reproduced. And in analogy to the remarks in *Le suicide*, Durkheim goes so far as to state that children feel comfortable under good discipline [see *Durkheim 2005b/1925: 199*], i.e., their needs, which flow into infinity, are limited, which at the same time means a certain degree of security [see *Durkheim 1969/1897: 272–282*].

As the second element of morality, Durkheim names the *attachment to social groups* (*l'attachement aux groupes sociaux*) and differentiates human actions according to the nature of the goals pursued. Actions that have only a personal goal in mind are without moral value, no matter what the goals are; moral actions, on the other hand, pursue impersonal goals. A moral action is supra-individual; its goal is directed towards society – i.e., towards the collective interest. Generally speaking, the moral realm begins where the social realm begins [see *Durkheim 2004a/1906: 53*]. However, to regard society as the goal of moral behavior, it must be more than just a collection of individuals; it must be different from the sum of individuals and have its own personality, a society *sui generis*. For Durkheim, society is the only moral being that stands above the individuals; it is both immanent and transcendent in human beings' consciousness.³² Man must have an interest in joining the society, and so Durkheim concludes, also in *Le suicide*, that more often man

²⁹ In the second part, only a few general theses on developing the autonomy of the will in children can be found since Durkheim did not elaborate on this chapter in his lectures.

³⁰ See also Münch [1988: 364–425], on socialization and personality development at Durkheim.

³¹ See, for example, Leclère [1909], who concludes that moral education is first provided by the family and only then by the school. On the significance of Durkheim's moral sociology for the school, see more precisely Durkheim [1992b/1910], and this further problematizing, Tyrell [2008].

³² Cf. Durkheim [2004a/1906: 78]: Thus, Durkheim already stated the moral and spiritual superiority of society in the *Rules*; see Durkheim [1950a/1895: 122].

commits suicide, the more he thinks and lives only about himself (egoistic suicide) [see *Durkheim 1969/1897: 222–232*].

The primary task of moral education is to bind the child to the family – as the society surrounding him at the moment. Although the family is the first instance of socialization, it is not a strictly moral institution. For Durkheim, the fatherland has a higher moral value than the family, and it is the task of the school to teach the child methodically to understand and love the fatherland, which in small embodies the idea of humanity, which should be the essential task of the school in moral education. The school thus assumes the function of the mediator between the “affective morality” of the family and the “more severe morality” of society [see *Lukes 1973: 115*].

Kant’s ideal postulate, autonomy as the principle of morality [cf. *Kant 1995/1788: 314*], is not attainable; the rule is heteronomy. To realize his idealistic goal of autonomy, the science of morality would have to be completed, but first of all – as Durkheim counters – moral *things* must be scientifically researched. Thus he understands the third element of morality, the *autonomy of the will* (*l’autonomie de la volonté*), to be insight, i.e., the understanding of morality, so that only consciously intended actions have a social value for him. The school’s task would then be to explain morality in a way that is understandable to the child³³, so that society becomes clear to him and he is prepared for life in it. Because if morality is not explained, the child would not get beyond an incomplete and low morality.

According to Durkheim, in rationalizing morality and moral education, one must not uncouple everything religious without replacing it, since this can lead to a simultaneous loss of the purely moral elements [see *Durkheim 2004b/1906: 101*]. But not only does morality need to be anchored in religion, religion also needs to be anchored in morality. “In the religious, there must therefore be moral and religion in the moral.”³⁴ The morality to be rationalized must not lose any of its constitutive elements and should, at the same time, gain new elements through laicization. Not only the form of morality but also its basis is to be modified, whereby Durkheim is essentially concerned with the substitution of religious morality by a laic morality.

In any case, it becomes clear here from Durkheim’s remarks on the elements of morality that the sociology he developed as a moral science stands, as it were, between pure theory and factual moral action³⁵ – moral science is here elaborated by Durkheim as a new mixed type of science and practice with a clear intention to change the world, which resembles the form of the pedagogical *théorie pratique*. Basically, Durkheim’s moral science can be defined as a theory of reflection (self-description) of (French) society, and so Niklas Luhmann and Stephan H. Pfürtnner had already asked, with reference to Durkheim, “whether a sociological theory of morality, for its part, must be formulated morally free or whether

³³ “For teaching morality does not mean preaching and to set them up: it means explaining” [*Durkheim 2005b/1925: 165* – own translation]. See in more detail Durkheim [1909].

³⁴ Durkheim [2004a/1906: 69 – own translation]. See also Herbart [1964c/1835: 73], who postulates the connection between moral and religious education. On the relationship between morality and religion, see also Kant [1984/1803: 79–82], who states that religiousness without morality is to be regarded as reprehensible, but that morality without religiousness only creates an unfinished morality. Although Durkheim never directly mentions Kant’s lecture notes *On Pedagogy*, it can be assumed that he must have been familiar with them. It was translated into French in 1881 [see *Richard 1911: 322*]. In any case, the three elements of morality established by Durkheim clearly show the influence of Immanuel Kant.

³⁵ See also Abbott [2019: 2], who explores the question of “how Durkheim understands his own moral activity”.

it can be formulated morally free” [Luhmann – Pfürtner 1978: 7 – own translation]. For in Luhmann’s sense, with increasing social differentiation, the integrative achievements of the social system continue to decline, with the consequence that in a functionally differentiated society its social integration cannot be anchored in a moral order. Today, the integration processes can no longer be described according to the pattern of collective values and solidarities – as at Durkheim, for example – but they differ according to the respective function system. At the same time, however, this society retains “the communicative practice of addressing people as a whole by conditioning respect and disregard. Moral inclusion, therefore, as before, but without moral integration of the societal system.”³⁶ But one can, of course, in Luhmann’s sense also ask whether it can be the task of sociological analysis of society to evaluate society at the same time. For the “sociologist who wanted to rise above what moralists derive from their principles ultimately becomes a moralist himself” [Luhmann 1988a: 28 – own translation]. But of course, this was nothing unusual in France of the Third Republic.

6. Concluding Remarks

Interestingly enough, with his moral science derived from sociology and pedagogy, Durkheim was thus also able to win over almost all the competent voices of the Third Republic, whereby some reasons for this will be given here in conclusion. Durkheim elevates moral education, as the central problem of reflection in the French educational system, above the substrate of his sociology as an elaborated moral science to a theoretical focus. Already in the first version of *Division of labor*, he had postulated the establishment of a moral science, whereby morality was classified there as “a system of realized facts which is linked to the overall system of the world” [Durkheim 1930/1902: XLI – own translation]. The correlation of the division of labor and morality as the central thesis of this first major work can be interpreted here as an early reference to Durkheim’s moral conception of society. For him, the social order takes on the function of a ‘regulator’ of the social crisis, supported by the ‘new morality’ [Durkheim 1930/1902] for the crisis-prone Third Republic in France. Here, the professional groups, in particular, are seen as a possible solution, since they not only take over the family’s legacy in the economic sphere of modern society [see Durkheim 1950d: 255–256], but the concept of professional groups is essentially aimed at the normative orientation of social actors.

In general, Durkheim’s position fitted into the dominant intellectual landscape of France, so he replaced the paradigm of Kant’s philosophy – increasingly exposed to criticism towards the end of the 19th century – with his model of an empirical social science and participated, along with many other French intellectuals, in the discussions on the Dreyfus Affair. His sociopolitical reform ideas were aimed at an *individual* equalization of opportunities, which is particularly evident in his lecture series on socialism, begun in 1895/96 [see Durkheim 1992c/1928], so that Pierre Birnbaum, in his preface to the first edition of this 1928 lecture transcript, was able to describe him as the first theoretician of

³⁶ Luhmann [1988b: 6 – own translation]. In his systems theory, Niklas Luhmann assumes that, unlike in medieval society, there is no single morality in modern society that could regulate its social order. Morality can be thematized everywhere in society, but neither society nor its individual subsections can be integrated primarily through morality, as Durkheim had imagined.

social mobility [see *Birnbaum 1992: 20*]. Concerning questions of education, this led to the postulate of equality, i.e., that talent and achievement should figure as the only selection criterion for social positions, which already appears in the chapter on inheritance in *Division of labor*.³⁷

Finally, with these points, Durkheim fulfilled precisely the expectations of the Third Republic's political-administrative system in France, so that he can be considered the intellectual par excellence of the time since he embodied what the government and the reformers were considering for the French nation. Durkheim's work was based on a double crisis, which he wanted to help solve: on the one hand, a *moral crisis* of the modernizing French society, and on the other hand, a *scientific crisis* of the humanities in France at that time. For Durkheim, these two crisis phenomena are closely connected and should be approached with the same means – with a new moral science. And his *sociology of education*, elaborated in *L'éducation morale*, was the basis for combating these two crises and for developing a moral science, especially a sociological one. With it, Durkheim strove for a change in French society, established sociology at French universities, and pursued a new sociology concept: *sociology as a moral science*.

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³⁷ See Durkheim [1930/1902: 291–318]. Durkheim thus stands in the tradition of the principle of *démocratisation de l'enseignement*, which is the guiding principle of educational policy in France and has served as the point of departure for virtually all attempts to reform the French educational system since Condorcet's demands for an equal right to education for all, the best possible development of their talents and abilities in a public education system regulated by law, and the emphasis on talent and achievement as the only selection criterion for social positions. Bourdieu – Passeron [1970], on the other hand, have, as is well known, used good arguments to emphasize the *Illusion of equal opportunities* in education and society.

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