

**Kusá, Zuzana – Tížik, Miroslav: Elementary Forms of Social Thought. Contemporary Reflections on Durkheim's Ideas**  
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This compilation dedicated to the legacy of Émile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) comprises a set of contributions presented at a conference held in May 2008 on the occasion of 150th birth anniversary of this prominent sociology classic. When speaking about classic, we may come across its mocking definition presenting it as something what everybody would like to have read, but nobody really wants to read. This ironic remark is certainly not valid for the authors of this work, who provide the readers with a critical reflection and insider's view on É. Durkheim's theoretical concepts. Even though it is rather exceptional in Slovakia to lead a critical dialogue with the classics (as the authors Zuzana Kusá and Miroslav Tížik observe), the published texts prove that author's legacy does not fade into the grey zone of indifference and obscurity. Overall, the compilation comprises 16 contributions written by Slovak and Czech sociologists divided into 4 thematic parts with the following titles: 1. Maintaining the legacy, 2. Durkheim and sociological theory, 3. Public sphere, morality and education and 4. Durkheim and the study of collective representations.

First contribution is an energetic and inspiring commentary on the contribution of this classic's work to contemporary sociology, its originality, and topicality. Author *Dilbar Alieva* points out that with his extensive work Durkheim has built for the sociological community a „common sociological home, a supra-individual shelter, where not only sociological objectivists, but also subjectivists, not just realists, but also nominalists are happy to take cover.“ (p. 16) Even though, nowadays, Durkheim's legacy and sociological school (such as several basic dichotomies in sociology, rules for methodology etc.) is perceived in a more or less automatic manner, author points out, that it had experienced hard times in conquering the home sociological territory in the context of that time. Curiously enough, this had most probably contributed to well elaborated arguments and clear and still precious concept definitions, while „The fact that members of opposing sociological paths can benefit from Durkheim's legacy proves not only its encyclopaedic breadth, but also a certain universality of his ideas, which become paradigmatically binding on the whole sociological community.“ (pp. 29-30) It can be added, that these are the true attributes of classic and classical theory concepts. According to the author, one-sided approach to classic's legacy is where the risk lies today. Selective and rather tactical use of Durkheim's legacy results in that social scientists either demonstrate continuity of their approaches on the legacy in a superficial manner or highlight the benefits of promoted approach in opposition to traditional approaches. No wonder that the classic's extensive and rich work has acquired a number of characteristics with the time. The author acquaints the readers with a few of them in more detail.

The following two contributions written by *Miloslav Petrusek* and *Dušan Janák* reflect on Durkheim as found in the works of classics of Czech sociology. M. Petrusek acquaints the reader with several „encounters of Czech sociology with Durkheim“ (p. 53), namely in the work by E. Beneš, I. A. Bláha, J. L. Fischer, A. Uhlř, E. Chalupný, J. Sedláček and E. Gellner. Author takes actual cases of references and reactions to the work of the classic and concludes that Durkheim's influence on Czech

sociology cannot be called marginal at all. On the other hand, however, he is not confident about Durkheim school being steadily formed in the Czech milieu. Nevertheless, reader learns the representatives of Czech sociology, who were tied to francophone sociological environment as well as that the only monograph on E. Durkheim was affected by the time, in which it was published, namely by the normalization period (J. Sedláček, 1979). Very interesting is also author's reflection to what extent had Durkheim's well-known treatise on suicide been influenced by earlier work by T. G. Masaryk. D. Janák discusses in more detail Durkheim's influence over I. A. Bláha, who had been his personal student in Paris. He analyses the main points of convergence and divergence of Bláha's work with Durkheim's positivism and objectivism. Unlike Durkheim Bláha emphasizes the importance of subjectivist approach to the analysis of social reality as well as the importance of individual actions. Author observes, that one of the key factors leading to the deviation from Durkheim's approach were „problems with methodology in his own research“. (p. 60)

Juraj Schenk focuses in his study on the problem of emergence and its specific solution. Author illustrates the problem of emergence on the case of a typical dispute between individualism and holism, while he considers the given solution to be a distinctive particularity of the whole Durkheim sociologism. After initial thoughts inspired by Durkheim's work, reader is provided with current approaches to the issue of emergence in more detail. Through thorough and well-elaborated explication, author presents in a systematic way the development of approaches and various interpretations of emergence and emergence phenomena. Emergence, often defined as the antipole of reductionism (p. 80), is related to the independence of complex wholes properties, or with phenomena on the macro level, while the focus of attention is on the mechanisms of the origin and dynamics of complexity. Analysis of emergences has gradually shifted scientific knowledge into a form of well-elaborated terms and schemes as well as into disputable issues that have not been solved yet (such as the question of the mysteriousness of strong emergence) and whose nature and ongoing challenges are presented to the readers in more detail.

Contributions in the second part of the collection focus on selected issues of sociological theory. Two separate texts by *Jiří Šubrt* and *Eva Laiferová* deal with the question of time in Durkheim's theory. J. Šubrt introduces Durkheim's understanding of time as basic social category that organizes our thinking and is characterised by universality and constancy (p. 107). In general, social categories form part of supra-individual collective consciousness and their content is represented by various aspects of social being (e.g. the basis of the category time is the rhythm of collective life – collective activities and their repetition). Simultaneously, they are also a precondition for cooperation of participants in reaching the common goal. Later on, this understanding of time became the basis for concept of social time, which author considers being the key concept. E. Laiferová uses famous Durkheim's dichotomy of the sacred and the profane to emphasize the need to include the concept of time and define time limits for the dynamics of course of events (such as periodicity of rituals, rhythm of sacred and profane periods, rhythm of collective life). Author has observed the theme of temporality of social life and classic's continuity mainly in the field of the so-called temporalised sociology, whose distinctive features are found in the works by A. Giddens, B. Adamová, M. C. Kearl and M. Maffesoli.

The issue of social categories is further developed and supplemented by *Martin Kánovský*. The text is a critical reflection of strong and weak aspects of Durkheim's and Mauss' theory of social classifications. Theory is built on systematic causal relationship between social organization (arrangement of society) on the one side and on the other side on symbolic classifications (representations of people). Critically, author studies „how wrongful arguments reached an impasse“ (p. 116) and tries to draw lessons from these shortcomings. Major part of author's thoughts is formed by thinking about the disputable explanation of the origin of symbolic classifications, namely the classification abilities of individuals, whose origin had been given inaccurate reasons and the character of their mutual connectedness with collective consciousness. Despite these shortcomings, Kánovský points out the strong aspects of Durkheim's theory of social classifications, mainly their pioneering character, courage of thought and theoretical inspiration.

Main theme of *Jan Maršálek's* text is the context of the period and mutual relationship between Durkheim's sociology and political philosophy. Author describes Durkheim's sociology as a form of political thinking or as political philosophy. By analysing the work of the classic he highlights the most distinctive examples of political thinking as well as his relationship with political science, for example in *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893). Even though some arguments can be further discussed in relation to the point whether it is possible to draw a more marked line between sociology and politics, Maršálek's innovative perspective on the work of the classic confirms again its richness, wide scope and a stimulating nature.

Authors of the last contribution to this second thematic part *Zuzana Kusá* and *David Kostlán* focus on the issue of division of labour in the society and organic solidarity emphasising their present-day importance. They understand the analysis of the issue of the division of labour in the society as „a masterly example of the analysis of conditions and limitations of social integration“ (p. 164). After having briefly specified the understanding of solidarity as a term, authors' attention shifts to the notion of organic solidarity and division of labour highlighting its abnormal forms such as anomie and forced labour. This consequently begs the question related to the regulation of economic life, processes of formation of rules or moral norms (spontaneity and decentralization), as well as view of the issue of social justice (as a prerequisite for cohesion) and inequality (internal and external inequalities). Even though often ignored, it is this emphasis on equality and justice that authors consider the principal Durkheim's legacy either to contemporary modern society or to the community of social scientists.

The third section is thematically devoted mainly to how Durkheim's work is linked to education and pedagogy. However, an exception to this is *Ivan Chorvát's* text focused primarily on sociology of morality. Author thinks that morality is a coherent constituent present everywhere in this classic's rich work (p. 184) making references to those texts, in which this interest was mostly manifested. From Durkheim's point of view, sociology was particularly suitable for analysing various forms of morality and the foundation of moral activities, mainly due to its emphasis on empirical analysis (p. 187). Readers are acquainted with three basic dimensions of Durkheim's understanding of morality. Author also points out that „morality is a basic tool for regulating and preserving the society“ (p. 191)

Elements of education and pedagogy in Durkheim's work are analysed in a study written by *Miroslav Dopita*. Author acquaints the reader briefly with basic definitions of education (its role and subject) and draws attention to the fact of discriminating between the terms education and pedagogy. *Peter Ondrejko* has analysed Durkheim's understanding of how the division of labour and social differentiation are interconnected with educational goals. In addition, he described classic's reflections and definitions as the roots of sociology of education. Heart of the mentioned interconnectedness lies in the fact that „society creates requirements for specialized division of labour and thus also a specialized form of preparation, and education. Differentiated society is the cause of the requirement for a differentiated education...“ (p. 208) When speaking of social differentiation Durkheim called attention to the role of school, as well as to the need for the equality of opportunities in educational system, in which education is to „internalize the norms and values of the environment, where individuals live and simultaneously arouse children's requested qualities enabling them to live in a society“. (p. 209) *Štefánia Kövérová* has also devoted to education and concentrates on analysing the influence of Durkheim's education concept on pedagogical theory and practice. Author ponders what out of classic's legacy has been testified and what has been disproved in the later pedagogical practice and which of Durkheim's ideas on education were ahead of his time.

The fourth, the last section of the collection comprises three texts on the field of religion and religious life. Durkheim's analysis of religious life known in public mainly thanks to his last book entitled *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) belongs to one of the most cited writings. The famous dichotomy between the sacred and the profane has inspired the author of the first text, namely *Ida Keiserová*. Author describes her text as an answer to the question to what extent it is possible to apply Durkheim's definition of religion on the analysis of religion in contemporary western societies. It is based on the so-called secularisation thesis and its unfulfilled assumptions. At the same time, she transforms the dichotomy sacred/profane into dichotomy between the everyday (common, standard, routine) and the unusual (uncommon, special, routineless). Thus, Durkheim's differentiation of the profane and the sacred has become an inspiring tool for the analysis of experiences in an unusual reality represented from the viewpoint of the author by the phenomenon of alternative worlds. These are the worlds we run to if we wish to fulfil our human needs for extraordinary experiences, and ritual plays an important role in these extraordinary worlds.

Pitfalls and risks related to thinking about Durkheim's theoretical conception are in detail presented by *Miroslav Tižik*. Author points out that one of the biggest pitfalls are the appropriate translations of his original texts and as a result appropriate interpretations. Author focuses primarily on the field of religious life analysis and uses several examples to illustrate the shift in meanings of some terms. Besides, he deems it necessary to study the continuity of reflections in Durkheim's writings alluding mainly to the analysis of shifts in thinking throughout his more than 30 years long scientific life. According to the author, in this way it is possible to get rid of the sediments of one-sided interpretations and designations of Durkheim's legacy, which has often been reduced to purely objectivist. (p. 265) However, opposed to this attribute is the fact that Durkheim's analysis of religious life and religious experiences often relies on

subjective side of life (e.g. subjective experience of the relationship to the sacred and so on). These reflections form the foundation, which several representatives of interpretative sociology draw on.

The last contribution in the collection is *Roman Vido's* text on the clash of Durkheim's legacy with present-day sociology of religion. Key status in these reflections is again given to the context of secularization thesis often defined as the decrease in the importance of religion in modern societies. Opponents of this thesis oppose claiming that the need for religion persists. They also stress that rather than disappearing, we have been witnessing a process, in which religion is undergoing a process of transformation into new, and modern forms. In this regard, author presents in detail the concept of civic religion considering Durkheim to be one of its fathers.

Finally, we can observe that the effort to „dust off“ and update Émil Durkheim's legacy through extensive collection has been successful making it a valuable contribution to understanding the life work of this eminent classic. As we have had the opportunity to see Durkheim keeps inspiring contemporary sociology often characterised by variedness of themes and approaches. Published texts are an information source, useful not just for students, which can help orientate in basic sociological terms as well as in basic principles of Durkheim's understanding of social reality. Besides, we can expect, that those readers, who accept the invitation to a more intimate meeting with the classic will gradually reach for his original writings and bring us new observations and inspiration for reading.

Katarína Strapcová