

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

- Born in France. Father was rabbi, mother Roman Catholic. By early adulthood was agnostic.
- Studied history and philosophy
- “Father” of sociology

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

- Texts
 - *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1893)
 - *Suicide* (1897)
 - *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912)

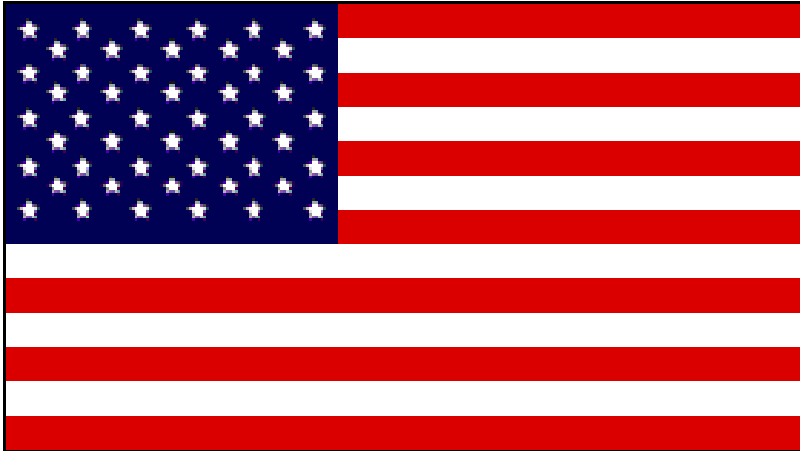
Durkheim

- Religion is something social
- Accepts limited social evolution:
elementary to complex
- Rejects Frazer's steady upward march
from magic, religion, science

Durkheim – Key Concepts

- Sacred vs. profane
- Sacred is not “supernatural”
- Social (clan) vs. the personal
- Religion and magic can co-exist
- Totems
 - Emblem, symbol of clan
 - Totemic principle = hidden force worshipped by the clan

Durkheim



- The totem is at once the “symbol of the god and of the society”
- “the god of the clan can be nothing else than the clan itself”

Durkheim

- Function of religious rituals is to allow persons to renew their commitment to the community
- Devotion to the totem is devotion to the clan

Emile Durkheim

Definition of religion

Religion is “a system of ideas with which individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it.”

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“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church all those who adhere to them.”

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- The sacred is the social
- The religious is the sacred
- Therefore, the religious is the social

Bottom line?

Durkheim

Religion is a social construct that builds group cohesion and solidarity.

Society can't exist with cohesion.
That's why religion persists.

Jesse Ventura

“Religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers.”



Next class

Eliade

The “isms”:

substantivism vs reductionism