

**Classical Sociological Theory**  
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**Elementary forms of Religious Life (1912)**

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## Elementary forms of Religious Life (1912)



Welcome back to the class. Today we are discussing a very interesting work by Émile Durkheim, maybe one of the earliest sociological work on religion especially theoretical work on religion. His book titled “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” was published in 1912.



The book is widely considered as one of the foundational works on anybody who wants to understand the sociological explanation on one of the most important social phenomenon, namely religion. Even today, it continues to be a classic. There are quite a lot of critical reflections on Durkheim and his work for everybody who wants to understand the sociological explanation on religion.

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- Durkheim was deeply interested in the nature of symbols and their reciprocal effects on patterns of social organization.

he saw in religion a chance to study how interaction among individuals leads to the creation of symbolic systems that

- (1) lace together individual actions into collective units,
- (2) regulate and control individual desires, and
- (3) attach individuals to both the cultural (symbolic) and structural (morphological) facets of the social world.



Durkheim was deeply interested in the nature of symbols and their reciprocal effects on patterns of social organization. You must have understood that this particular point is very pertinent in case of Durkheim because for him society constitutes a reality in itself and the task of sociology is to make sense of that.

For him social fact is a very broad category which includes both the material and symbolic systems, social institutions and other forms of social organizations. As a sociologist, Durkheim had very deep interest into this whole question of the nature of symbols and their reciprocal effects on the patterns of social organizations.

You know that this whole idea of values and symbols, they constitute a very important part of our culture, especially the non-material aspect of our culture and the kind of reciprocal relationship between the non-material aspects of the culture and the material aspects of the culture is something very important.

This is something very unique to that of the human beings as a species that we have enormously advanced systems of symbols, values, virtues and ethics and other things and they vary in a significant manner. They shape the material aspect of our society. Durkheim as a sociologist was deeply interested in this.

So, he saw in religion a chance to study how interaction among our individuals leads to the creation of symbolic systems that will lead to a series of functions. But his interest in religion emerges as a reflection of his interest in much larger questions.

Religion definitely represents one of the very important and interesting systems of symbols. In religion he saw a chance to study how interactions among individuals lead to the creation of symbolic systems that has a series of important consequences on the society. So, for him religion is a symbolic system which has the ability to lace together individual actions into collective units.

We already saw that one of the most important concerns of Émile Durkheim is to see that how is that human beings who are quite unpredictable in terms of their desires, actions, orientations, and motivations are able to work or are able to act in more or less predictable ways; more or less institutionalized ways; more or less uniform ways.


How the symbolic systems are able to lace together individual actions into collective units and regulate and control individual desires. We have discussed I think sufficiently in the previous discussions especially when he talks about anomie that the social systems that are capable of moulding individual desires are something very important.

You cannot allow or you cannot have a society where individuals are completely free to pursue their own wild dreams with the scant regard to the overall ethical, social and moral fabric of the society. A society cannot work in that way because many things what you consider are something very important and very defining of your personality, defining of your essence, might be violating somebody's freedom or it could be inimical to the entire for the overall benefit of the society.


In that sense that came; again, taking a very conservative view argued that the symbolic systems are extremely important or capable in regulating and controlling individual desires and attach individuals to both the cultural, symbolic and structural morphological facets of the social world.

How these symbolic systems play a very important role in defining and attaching individuals to the symbolic systems as well as that of the structural aspect of the society? So, Durkheim uses this term morphology when he talks about social structure. Both this how individuals are attached to both the symbolic as well as the structural or morphological aspects of society was a major concern for Durkheim.

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- In *Suicide* Durkheim writes: "Religion is in a word the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself; it is the characteristic way of thinking of collective existence."
- To understand the essence of religious phenomena without the distracting complexities and sociocultural overlays of modern social systems
- Religious life of aboriginal people: the Arunta aborigines of Australia



Even before he writes this book on 'Elementary Forms of Religious Life', Durkheim has written in his work on 'Suicide' about the importance of religion: "Religion is in a word the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself; it is the characteristic way of thinking of the collective existence."

You know, it is a very instinctive argument and these ideas are there in Durkheim's mind even when he writes "Suicide". But he develops these arguments more forcefully in his work of this "Elementary Forms of Religious Life". For him, religion is in a word the system of symbols by means which society becomes conscious of itself. It is a very important definition of religion which he elaborates in this book.

Religion in a way is a society itself. It is in the way in which society becomes conscious of itself. It is the characteristic way of thinking of collective existence and this is a very radically different explanation in comparison with a host of other definitions given by social scientists. We will elaborate that. Because he does not invoke the idea of God, idea of a transcendental power and a particular theology. Rather he has something very radical to say when he talks about religion. He has a definition which we will come to that.

To understand the essence of religious phenomena without the distracting complexities some sociocultural overlays of modern systems. With the very title 'The Elementary Forms of Religious Life', Durkheim really wanted to understand the most elementary, the most primary forms of religion. That is why he studied one of the most primitive societies. He studies this Aranda aborigines of Australia. He studied their totem system and it is from this system of totemism that he developed the study.

He did not want to study the articulations or religiosities of modern societies because it could be quite complicated. So, he believed that some of the most elementary societies, some of the most primitive societies exhibits the most elementary forms of religion. This is the reason why he wanted to study religion without getting distracted by the complexities of this modern society.

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- Durkheim defined religion as “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.”
- The distinctive character of religion is that the world is divided into sacred and profane realms which are opposed to one another. The sacred is surrounded by myriad rituals and prohibitions which allow it to maintain a distance from profane life.
- Any object can become sacred. Religion brings together believers into the ceremonial organization of the church.



Here we come to the very interesting definition of religion. It is an extremely interesting and important definition. He defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to **sacred things**”, I have highlighted this word sacred in red colour, “that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called Church, all those who adhere to them.” and it is something very important.

Religion is a system of a unified system of beliefs and practices and this is one of the first component. He understands the religion not as an incoherent system of beliefs. He understands religion as a very coherent, unified system of beliefs and practices because it appears as a complete whole.

The moral system, the theology, the practices, the belief system, the rituals, everything appear or everything is presented to a believer as a coherent uniform system. So, that one justifies the other. One interprets the other. One legitimizes the other. So, you will not find much of a contradiction in religious explanations.

He argues that it is a system of beliefs and practices related to sacred thing. This is the crux of his argument. The opposition between sacred and its opposite that is the profane. He defines sacred not as something connected with God.

He is not defining sacred as something related to God, Almighty or something transcendental or supernatural. He is defining sacred as that is to say things that are set apart and forbidden. Things that are of course a part of your life but things which are not part of everyday life. Things which you do not use it for as a kind of an instrumental manner. Things which are kept aside. Things that are forbidden. Things that always comes with a kind of an aura. And, a set of beliefs and practices which unite it into a single moral community called as Church, all those which who adhere to them.

He understands it as a moral community, as a group of people who are united by a unified system of beliefs and practices related to a particular notion of sacredness. Even the plethora of material things that are available, he makes a distinction between a sacred and the profane. Profane is the thing that which we do not attach anything special; any special characteristic towards that, things which we use without much of a thinking, things which we use in our everyday life whereas sacred is things that are set apart; things that are forbidden.

This distinctive character of religion is that the world is divided into sacred and profane realms which are opposed to one another. The sacred is surrounded by myriad rituals and prohibitions which allow it to maintain a distance from the profane life. This is a very important argument put forward by Durkheim.

He argued that in every society, whether it is the modern capitalist society like the kind of society the Paris, for example in which Durkheim lived or the most primitive tribe that he wanted to study. In every society Durkheim argued that you will be able to find these two distinct domains.

One is the domain of profane where things are usual. You use everything without much of, you do not really you use them instrumentally. They are part of your utilitarian existence. You use them as tools. It is a part of your everyday life.

On the other hand, there are certain things, there are certain things which are kept aside. They are forbidden. You approach them with lot more caution. You approach them with a lot more respect. There is something attached to that and what is that something is what Durkheim is trying to explain.

So, sacred and profane realms are opposed to one another and you cannot really mix them together. You cannot, make the sacred into profane. It is not entertained in any society. It is not tolerated in any society: the profanation of the sacred. On the other hand, you can make certain profane things into sacred. There is a social process into that. But these two realms are considered to be separate.

The sacred is surrounded by myriad rituals and prohibitions which allowed it to maintain a distance from the profane life. So, there are a quite a lot of rituals and procedures and myths and ideas that give a kind of a unique stature or unique position to that of the things that are defined as sacred.

Again, I am repeating, he is not talking about the sacred as anything to do with God or anything to do with the idea of a supernatural force or a transcendental force. He is not defining it. So, any object can become sacred. Religion brings together believers into the ceremonial organization of the church and this is another very important argument.

Anything can become a sacred. It could be a stone or an idol or it could be book or it could be pen, it could be a relic, it could be piece of bone, it could be a tree, it could be a river. Anything can become a sacred and why that certain things become sacred and why that certain things remain as profane is a very interesting question.

In order to understand that you will have to look dwell into the deep historical and cultural domains of those societies. So, religion brings together believers into the ceremonial organization of the church. A church, here he is using the church as a group of a moral community who are brought together; who have a kind of a social organization; something that is binding them together.

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- The earliest religions were found in the totemism of the aboriginal natives of Australia.
- Individual members share in the sacredness of the totem attached to their clan, which imparts a kind of pan-spiritualism to the entire culture.
- The totem symbolizes the clan and the spirits associated with it. If the clan and the spirit have the same symbol, that is because the spirit is in reality society; the spirit, or God, and society are one and the same.
- For Durkheim, like Marx, the secret of religion is found in society.



So, he argues this the earliest form of religions were found in the totemism of the aboriginal natives of Australia. This is why he identifies this totemism as the most elementary form of religious life and hence the title. Totemism, you attach certain kind of sacred qualities to quite a lot of objects around you. It could be an animal, rock or a mountain.

But these totems they occupy a very distinct position in the life of every tribe and you do not kill a totemic animal. While you can hunt every other animal, you do not kill it. Killing a totemic animal is considered to be a major sin. This totem is a particular object which is declared by the community and hence it assumes a kind of a particular special status.

Individual members share in the sacredness of the totem attached to their clan, which imparts a kind of pan-spiritualism to the entire culture. This whole set of ideas, beliefs and notions of sacredness associated with a particular type of a totem. A totem could be an eagle. Or it could be a bear. It could be a deer. Or it could be a particular rock. Or it could be particular tree, but the point Durkheim highlights is this cultural orientation and the argument that this particular object is divine, it is totem is shared by everybody. Nobody violates that. This particular belief system of this exceptional quality or exceptional orientation towards this particular totem has been very strongly, internalized, and it is transmitted from one generation to another and that is why there is a pan-spiritualism of this entire culture. There is nobody who does not believe in that.

Here again I invite your attention to Durkheim this fundamental difference between organic and mechanical solidarity where in societies characterized by mechanical solidarity,



everybody adheres to the similar kind of belief in comparison with modern societies characterized by organic solidarity.

So, the totem symbolizes the clan and the spirits associated with it. If the clan and the spirits have the same symbol, that is because the spirit is in reality society; the spirit, or God and the society are one and the same. So, it is here that Durkheim extends the argument and to say that the totem really represents the society. The totem really represents the clan. The clan really represent the society.

So, by worshipping the totem, these people are actually worshipping the society and it is a very radically and a very provocative argument. It is a very, non-religious argument, it is a very secular explanation of a religion. So, that is why for Durkheim, like Marx, the secret of religion is found in society.

You come across a very interesting parallel between the arguments of Durkheim and Marx. But both of them have different orientations. While Marx is extremely critical of religion and believes that it is a false consciousness. Marx believes that people fall prey to the institution of religion because they live in a very inhuman and exploitative world.

Once Marx believes that human beings will be able to tide over this false consciousness. They will be able to overcome this false consciousness when the revolution comes; when the final socialist or communist society comes into being.

Durkheim does not have any such kind of hopes. He does not believe that religion is false consciousness. He understands that religion is an extremely important institution which is not going to fade away. Whichever society that you have, you will have this idea of religion. You will have to have this idea of sacred.

This is an extremely important argument that every society will have certain things which will be considered as sacred. He is not saying it is God. Keep it in mind. He is not saying that every society will have idea of God. No, he is not saying that.

But he is saying that every society will have something understood as sacred by a set of people. So, Durkheim like Marx, the secret of religion is found in society but their opinion differs very significant.

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- he investigates the ways in which the sacred is maintained and communicated to people in everyday life, even in non-religious communities. According to Durkheim, religion is society worshipping itself; religion expresses community,



- Individuals need to reaffirm their sense of community, their collective vitality, their shared ideals, through rituals and ceremonies, whose prototype is religion.

- Celebrations and reunions are regenerators of moral force in which the individual gains a sense of strength from participation in rituals and actually feels the power of collective experience.



Durkheim investigates the ways in which the sacred is maintained and communicated to people in everyday life, even in non-religious communities. According to Durkheim, religion is society worshipping itself; religion expresses community. So, in the latter part of his book he brings forth this argument very forcefully.

He investigates the ways in which the sacred is maintained and communicated to the people in everyday life, even in non-religious communities because you require a system, you require a mechanism to maintain and communicate to the next generation about the sacredness of this particular object. It cannot be left alone.

Of course, it takes a very unconscious character; a kind of a mechanical continuation after sometime. But there has to be much calibrated process of maintaining its sacredness and this maintenance of the sacredness that significantly depends in maintaining kind of an exclusive esteem for this particular sacred thing; and in communicating, in educating the new generation, in spreading its importance across the group.

So, they are very important conscious institutionalized activities, even in non-religious communities. According to Durkheim, religion is society worshipping itself; religion expresses community and this is an important argument. Of course, quite a lot of later sociologists of religion have disagreed with it. They have criticized Durkheim for that.

Durkheim understands religion as created by human beings. There is nothing divine about it, it has nothing to do with a God. It is not the God has created, given certain ideals and human beings followed that and then created a particular religion. He completely negates those arguments; he completely refutes those argument.

For him, religion is nothing but society worshipping itself. Religion is nothing but a particular form or particular manifestation of community. He argues that individuals need to affirm their sense of community, their collective vitality, their shared ideals through rituals and ceremonies whose prototype is religion. Every society requires certain mechanism through which the people re-affirm their commitment to this sense of community.


Every society requires certain ceremonies, rituals, procedures, spectacles, occasions through which they are able to revitalize. They are able to revitalize the very essence of their belongingness and this is what Durkheim argues as the inherent quality of religion.

Celebrations and reunions are regenerators of moral force in which the individual gains a sense of strength from the participation in rituals and actually feels the power of collective experience. This is something he was significantly influenced by whole lot of social psychologists who pointed out that when you are part of a large group or for example, when you walk along with a procession or when you take part in a huge celebration, you experience something different.


You act differently and the mob psychologies many times explained in this particular manner. Or huge processions, when you take part in a procession; when you raise slogans. When you raise slogan, your individuality is at a much lower level and something takes over you. You experience a kind of a different life. You are able to identify with the group with the much higher sense of strength.

So, celebrations and reunions are regenerators of moral force and this is the kind of a connection between the individual and the community in which the individual gains a sense of strength from the participation in rituals and actually feel the power of collective experience.

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- By participating in shared ceremonies, whether religious or secular, the individual finds himself in moral harmony with his comrades and develops more confidence, courage, and boldness.
- Durkheim states that ceremonies and rituals "perpetually give back to the great ideals a little of the strength that the egoistic passions and daily personal preoccupations tend to take away from them. This replenishment is the function of public festivals, ceremonies, and rites of all kinds."



So, by participating in shared ceremonies, whether religious or secular, the individual finds himself in moral harmony with his comrades and develop more confidence, courage and boldness. A whole lot of explanations about communal riot or communal violence is usually explained in the similar line.

Why that people can become so cruel? Or why that people can act so boldly at a time of communal violence? Or ordinary people, very innocent people they can unleash some of the most severe forms of violence and something takes over them in a mob fury.

It could be looting; it could be arson; it could be murder; it could be rape. The people get transformed and Durkheim argued that whether in the form of a religious congregation or a congregation of people during a national celebration of the Independence Day or a cultural day, people experience that. When they come together in a large group, when they have similar kind of ideas, then something takes over them.

Their individuality goes down at a much lower level and collectivity emerges. And in that sense, this moral connection, the moral force, the kind of a quality of relationship, the intensity of relationship between the individual and the society and the community assumes so much of power. It becomes extremely powerful.

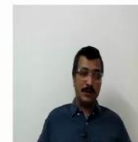
So, by participating in shared ceremonies, whether religious or secular, the individuals finds himself in moral harmony with his comrade. It is a very strong sense of friendship; a very strong sense of relationship and develops more confidence, courage and boldness.

Durkheim states that ceremonies and rituals perpetually gives back the great ideas, a little of the strength that the egoistic passions and daily personal preoccupations tend to take away from them. This replenishment is the function of public festivals, ceremonies and rites of all kinds.

So, when an individual leads a solitary life, he is all alone or she is all alone and this solitary individual the person who leads a very egoistic life. Once they come together, they participate in these rituals and other things, he says that this replenishes the function of public festival, ceremonies and rites of all kinds.

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- Society consecrates certain ideas as sacred even if they are not religious. Thus, nationalism in many countries is a "sacred" idea with its own symbols, beliefs, prohibitions, etc., which people feel is a part of their very identity.
- Durkheim believes communing together create a "collective effervescence," a kind of collective fusion and ecstasy which is recreated through ritual and celebration.
- Collective effervescence is the source of new social ideals and beliefs, like that of Russian and French Revolutions.



Society consecrates certain ideas as sacred even if they are not religious. This is an extremely important point which I mentioned several times. Society has the power to consecrate certain things. It has the ability to make certain things sacred from the profane.

So, here the point I am emphasizing again and again that he is not talking about anything other worldly. He is not talking about anything divine. He is talking about the process through which certain things are transformed into divine i.e. how this divinity is created, is constructed.

It has nothing to do with a God coming from above and making certain things sacred. It is the social processes itself make certain things sacred. These things do not need to have anything to connect with transcendental or superhuman or supernatural or divine, nothing of that sort.

Even some of the most mundane and ordinary things can be consecrated. Thus for example, nationalism in many countries is sacred idea with its own symbols, beliefs, prohibitions, etc,

which people feel is a part of their very identity. The best example is of a non-religious sacred thing that your idea of nationalism and its symbols and its rituals.

You know with so much of respect that we are supposed to deal with our national flag. National flag is not a piece of cloth. Even legally if you use it just like any other piece of cloth, you will be punished under law of the land. Even in other countries where these laws are not very stringent, national symbols assume a kind of a sacred position.

National flags are respected, they were revered. National anthems even you know that even in India when national anthem is played, you are supposed to stand still. You are supposed to maintain silence or the kind of ceremonies associated with your Republic Day Parade for example.

Durkheim would argue that that Republic Day parade is just like a religious ritual. There is so much of parallel, so much of similarities between a religious ritual festival and the Republic Day Parade that takes place in front of, in New Delhi on every year. So, Durkheim would argue that it is exactly like a religious rituals' sans the kind of divinity or divine elements associated with that.

Every aspect of religious belief where certain things are prohibited, certain things are seen as something very important and Durkheim argues all these things really represent the quality of the sacred.

For Durkheim believers communing together create a collective effervescence, a kind of collective fusion and ecstasy which is recreated through ritual and celebration. So, this is a very important argument that he says when people come together, when believers come together, something happens among them.

He uses the word, this collective effervescence i.e. some kind of a releasing of energy taking place. Some kind of effervescence taking place when people come together. A kind of a collective fusion and ecstasy which is recreated through the ritual and celebration.

These rituals and celebrations according to Durkheim have the ability to create this collective effervescence when people come together, share the similar feeling, share the similar type of extent of religiosity whether it is related with sacred or with the divine aspects or even with the so called secular aspects.

Collective effervescence is the source of new social ideas and beliefs like that of Russian and French Revolution. It is very interesting. Durkheim says that when these huge revolutions take place, that leads to a new set of ideals; that gives birth to new set of practices; new set of worldviews and that they have the ability to completely transform the society.

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- Durkheim sees religion's influence everywhere. The fundamental categories of thought originate in the division of human nature into the sacred and the profane. This dualism has social origins, though it is expressed in religious terms.
- Notions of causality, Durkheim argued, could emerge only after people perceived that sacred forces determined events in the secular world. Notions of time and space could exist only after the organization of clans and their totemic cults.
- *"The most essential notions of the human mind, notions of time, of space, of genus and species, of force and causality, of personality, those in a word, which the philosophers have labeled categories and which dominate the whole logical thought, have been elaborated in the very womb of religion. It is from religion that science has taken them."*



So, Durkheim sees religion's influence everywhere. That is why I mentioned that for Durkheim a society without religion is impossible. He sees religious influence everywhere. The fundamental categories of thought originated in the division of human nature into sacred and profane.

He understands it even as a kind of a structural prerequisite as something unavoidable; something so intrinsic; something so essential that human society have these two division called as the sacred and the profane. This dualism has social origin, though it is expressed in religious terms. It has a social origin. It originated through social processes but it expresses as a kind of a religious terms.

So, notions of causality, Durkheim argued could emerge only after people perceived that the sacred forces determined events in the secular world. Notions of time and space could exist only after the organization of clans and their totemic cults.

Durkheim argues that even when you look at this evolutionary trajectory of every society, he makes a very important argument that a most of taken for granted no dimensions in your life; for example, the idea of time, space, community, all these things must have come into existence only after this divide is realized.

This divide between the sacred and the profane because people must have perceived that the sacred forces determine the events in the secular world. So, host of theories about emergence of religion almost argues this line. They believe that quite a lot of natural forces like thunder, or a lightning, or a wind; they have the ability to control the human life or the spirit of dead people. They have the ability to control the human life.

So, this must have, Durkheim argued, must have created this distinction between the sacred and the profane. Because you do not have any society which does not have the idea of sacred in its myriad forms. So, notions of time and space could exist only after the organization of clans and their totemic cults.

Time again, in the form of whether it is a linear time or a cyclical time? Or the kind of space. How do they understand the idea of the space? What is the boundary? What is the kind of in-space? What is kind of an out-space? So, all these categories which we now take for granted, have come into existence only after this division of society into sacred and profane.

The most essential, it is a quotation from Durkheim, “The most essential notions of human mind, the notions of time of space, of genus and species, of force and causality, of personality, those in a word, which the philosophers have labelled categories and which dominate the whole logical thought, have been elaborated in very womb of religion. It is from religion that the science has taken them.”

It is a very evocative argument that he believes that each of these categories have taken place in the womb of religion. In the womb of religion, it is from region that the science has taken them.






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The functions of religion are

- (1) to regulate human needs and actions through beliefs about the sacred and
- (2) to attach people, through ritual activities (rites) in cults, to the collective.

• As people participate in rituals, they reaffirm these internalized beliefs and, hence, reinforce their regulation by, and attachment to, the dictates of the clan. Moreover, the molding of basic mental categories such as cause, time, and space by religious beliefs and cults function to give people a common view of the world, thus facilitating their interaction and organization.



He argues in a very persuasive manner, that the functions of religion are to regulate human needs and actions through beliefs about the sacred. So, religion has this fundamental function of regulating human life and to attach people through ritual activities and rites in cults, to the collective.

As long as these necessary requirements are there that a human being cannot live a lonely life. They have to come together and something should bind them together. He also argued that religion will exist in every society and only this character of his binding force might differ.

In a traditional primitive society, it could be the totemism. In a more highly advanced societies, it could be the notion of God or it could be polytheistic religion or it could be in other societies, it could be a monotheistic religion. In Muslim societies, in Christian societies, it could be monotheistic religion.

In a more advanced societies, late modern societies where you do not simply have any notion of God, it could be certain values that actually hold you together. Notions of rights could be something holding together. The notion of human rights, liberty could be something that assumes the character of sacred. The whole idea of, the expression, the freedom, the freedom of expression. For many people, it is a sacred thing.

Human right is a sacred thing for many people. Individual liberty is sacred thing for many people. And many modern societies attach a kind of a sacred character to the secular ideals and this is an extremely important insight given by Durkheim; a fascinating insight.

With that categorization, he is able to provide a theoretical lens with which you can understand the most modern contemporary society and as well as the some of the most primitive societies.

As people participate in rituals, they affirm these internalized beliefs and hence reinforce their regulation by, and attachment to the dictates of clan. Moreover, the moulding of basic mental categories such as cause, time and space by religious beliefs and cults function to give people a common view of the world, thus facilitating their interaction and organization.

It provides them with a common view of the world because that is something very important. What guides this particular society? What are the things that are accepted? What are the things not accepted? How a person is supposed to behave? What are the accepted practices of doing certain things? What is moral and immoral?

So, Durkheim would argue that without an agreement, without a consensus on these basic premises, no society will function. For him, religion plays a significant role in providing these kinds of explanations.

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- *Elementary Forms* became the foundational book for the emergence of sociology of religion
- Social origin of religion
- Division between secular and sacred



So, now, once we try to, evaluate or kind of summarize his argument. This ‘Elementary Forms became the foundational book for the emergence of sociology of religion. As I told you in the very beginning, no student of sociology of religion, or no student of sociology is able to pursue anything further without resorting to this argument of religion by Durkheim.

Because it is so fundamental, especially this division between the sacred and the profane. Because so far, so till then all almost every explanation of religion revolved around the whole

question of supernatural, about the whole idea of God, about the idea of a transcendental God, about a supernatural power.

But here Durkheim comes with a very provocative argument, that by religion you are actually worshipping the society. It is a society that gets, refashioned or re-appeared as religion and that is why this social origin of religion and this division between secular and the sacred, and the profane and the sacred or the secular and the sacred.

They have the fundamental distinction between this secular and the sacred and has given rise to a whole lot of very interesting theoretical debates about secularity, about the emergence of secularism, the process of secularization and a host of very fascinating theoretical or debates in the latter decades and in that century.

So, let me stop here. We will have only one more class on Durkheim. It is a short evaluative session on the Durkheim's argument and with that, we will end this session. Thank you.