

## **Anomie According to Émile Durkheim**

Though the concept of anomie is most closely associated with Durkheim's study of suicide, in fact, he first wrote about it in his 1893 book *The Division of Labor in Society*. In this book, Durkheim wrote about an anomic division of labor, a phrase he used to describe a disordered division of labor in which some groups no longer fit in, though they did in the past. Durkheim saw that this occurred as European societies industrialized and the nature of work changed along with the development of a more complex division of labor.

He framed this as a clash between the mechanical solidarity of homogeneous, traditional societies and the organic solidarity that keeps more complex societies together. According to Durkheim, anomie could not occur in the context of organic solidarity because this heterogeneous form of solidarity allows for the division of labor to evolve as needed, such that none are left out and all play a meaningful role.

## **Anomic Suicide**

A few years later, Durkheim further elaborated his concept of anomie in his 1897 book, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. He identified anomic suicide as a form of taking one's life that is motivated by the experience of anomie. Durkheim found, through a study of suicide rates of Protestants and Catholics in nineteenth-century Europe, that the suicide

rate was higher among Protestants. Understanding the different values of the two forms of Christianity, Durkheim theorized that this occurred because Protestant culture placed a higher value on individualism. This made Protestants less likely to develop close communal ties that might sustain them during times of emotional distress, which in turn made them more susceptible to suicide. Conversely, he reasoned that belonging to the Catholic faith provided greater social control and cohesion to a community, which would decrease the risk of anomie and anomic suicide. The sociological implication is that strong social ties help people and groups survive periods of change and tumult in society.