



Stjepan G. Mestrovic

A Durkheimian Scholar



Note:

This presentation is based on the theories of Stjepan Mestrovic as presented in his *books* listed in the bibliography. A complete summary of his and other macro-social theories can be found in [*Macrosociology: The Study of Sociocultural Systems*](#), by Frank W. Elwell.



A brief summary...

Mestrovic is a Durkheimian. But before applying Durkheim's theory to modern society, he must first rehabilitate it from the ruins of Parsons' and Merton's functionalism.



A brief summary...

Derived very much from Durkheim, Mestrovic states that men and women are born with a strong ego or will. In fact, individuals can be conceived as having two natures [they are homo duplex] of the angel and the beast, the beast being the stronger of the two.



A brief summary...

Without strong integration into social groups—not just normative consensus on the rules of behavior and common values, but a love and commitment to these groups—the individual lacks strong moral guidance from their society and the ego or will is set loose upon the world. In such situations, men and women essentially exploit their fellow humans.



A brief summary...

It is important to note that Mestrovic does not believe the needed morality can come from a rational source; in fact, rationality tends to erode the moral authority needed to restrain exploitive behavior.



A brief summary...

Rather, what is needed is a revival of traditional and emotional structures that are capable of fully integrating people into society to keep them in check; love and commitment most of all. Lacking this integration, the will is left to its own devices and engages in barbarism and other exploitive behaviors to satisfy its whims.



Anomie

According to Mestrovic, the world is in crisis and sociology is having a difficult time in apprehending that crisis. “Nationalism, socialism, capitalism, and fundamentalism—the leading ‘isms’ that Durkheim tried to apprehend sociologically—are still causing turmoil in the world” (1988, p. ix).



Anomie

The West is without a comprehensive system of morality, each individual is left to her own devices, there is little restraint on individual will.



Anomie

Without a moral system that truly binds individuals to the social order, crime has reached epidemic levels; politics has become a game of power and dominance rather than governance and consensus; economic competition has become unrestrained and often counter to the good of the social whole.



Anomie

Violence in pursuit of individual “happiness” has become a way of life; suffering and discontent despite material abundance has become the norm.



Anomie

Durkheim saw anomie as a “pervasive discontent” afflicting modern society, a “collective derangement” brought about by the loosening of social bonds upon people—the rise of individualism, the weakening of family, of religion, as well as of professional groups and associations.



Anomie

According to Mestrovic, modern economic systems—whether they be capitalist, communist, or socialist—fail to provide moral guidance to the individual, instead promoting consumerism and economic self interest.



Barbarism

The western world is living at the height of civilization and barbarism. Human knowledge today is greater than ever before; our understanding of nature and our universe has never been so accurate. Literacy has been spread to the masses; higher education is increasingly available to wider segments of the population.



Barbarism

Our technology advances on a daily basis;
we manipulate our environment to fashion
goods and services at a scale unparalleled
in human history.



Barbarism

At the same time, we are living in an era when wars kill thousands; divorce is rampant; inequality within and between nations is high; democratic governments engage in torture; child abuse—sexual, emotional, physical—has seemingly become epidemic.



Barbarism

Mass murder on the part of governments has become commonplace; corporations exploit workers, consumers, governments, and the environment; murder and other forms of violent crime are at alarming rates; consumerism has become a way of life for many; drug use is epidemic; and politicians engage in lies and deception.



Barbarism

The list could easily go on—just go to any cable news channel on any given day, read a daily newspaper or a weekly news magazine—civilization is indeed advancing, barbarism is indeed on the rise. Mestrovic asks: could the two be inextricably intertwined?



Barbarism

Civilization, or the creation of rational institutions to contain barbarism, is simply not effective. Barbarism, or the will of the individual, cannot be constrained by such rationally constructed systems.



Barbarism

The “heart” (egoism) is always stronger than the “mind” (society); the constraining of the barbaric will can only be accomplished by other “habits of the heart” that are equally powerful. These habits of the heart are feelings of altruism and compassion, the other side of human nature that must be cultivated and given expression in our culture.



Barbarism

But, altruism cannot be systematized: “The moment one tries to systematize compassion into socialism, for example, one has converted a benign trait into its opposite. This is because, according to Durkheim, any time we act from duty, fear, or any sort of compulsion, we are really acting on the basis of egoistic self interest, which is the basis of barbarism...”



Barbarism

“Durkheim claims over and over again in his writings that genuine human goodness must be sought spontaneously, for its own sake” (1993, p. 47).



The Problem

The problem becomes how can we foster the development of such empathy and compassion within the individual? This problem becomes particularly acute in that the development of civilization seems to be eliminating the basis for empathy by weakening traditional institutions such as family and community and instilling the values of the marketplace which inflame the egoistic will.



The Problem

Both Durkheim and Mestrovic argue strongly that compassion cannot be learned, it can only be transmitted through example.



The Problem

To do this, Durkheim advanced “the revival of guild-like associations and the family” to model compassion and foster its development within individuals; such development would bind the individual to others with bonds of love and commitment.



The Problem

Such guilds have not been formed, and the family as well as religion, community, and other institutions that functioned to bind the individual to the whole continue to be weakened in the West.



The Problem

Durkheim's aphorism that "The gods are growing old or are already dead, and others are not yet born" remains true today. As a consequence, Western societies are in danger of disintegration.



The Problem

Seeking identity, values, direction, and meaning in the modern nation state and failing to find it, millions have turned to sectarian religions and ideologies that glorify folk identity and advocate “suspicion, paranoia, and sometimes even hate of neighbors” (1994, p. 8).



The Problem

Perhaps in reaction to the decline of traditional religion which was universal in nature and preached love and brotherhood, these fundamentalist faiths have attached themselves to political movements that seek to separate from the dominant culture and establish a more homogenous social order.



The Problem

“The important point is that modernity produces its own nemesis. In seeking to establish order and eliminate sentiment, modernity paradoxically produces disorder, fragmentation, and heightened passions—in a word, the anti-modern (or the genuinely postmodern)” (1994, p. 137).



The Problem

It was Durkheim who encompassed all of this within his sociology; Durkheim who made religion and the sacred a centerpiece of his thought; Durkheim who pointed to the increasing division of labor as the key to economic development as well as the root cause of anomie and widespread discontent.



The Problem

According to Mestrovic, the key insight of Durkheim and other early social scientists that society is held together by irrational feelings of love, affection, attachment, empathy, and devotion to one another has been lost to most modern sociologists.



The Problem

This loss, according to Mestrovic, has had tragic consequences for sociology and for western society.



Bibliography

Durkheim, E. (1956). *Education and Sociology*. (S. Fox, Trans.) New York: The Free Press.

Durkheim, E. (1925/1961). *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education*. (E. Wilson, & H. Schnurer, Trans.) New York: The Free Press.

Durkheim, E. (1953). *Sociology and Philosophy*. New York: The Free Press.

Durkheim, E. (1897/1951). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. (J. Spaulding, & G. Simpson, Trans.) New York: The Free Press.



Bibliography

Durkheim, E. (1893/1960). *The Division of Labor in Society*. (G. Simpson, Trans.) New York: The Free Press.

Durkheim, E. (1912/1954). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. (J. Swain, Trans.) New York: The Free Press.

Elwell, F. (2009), *Macrosociology: The Study of Sociocultural Systems*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

Mestrovic, S. G. (1988/1993). *Emile Durkheim and the Reformation of Sociology*. Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.



Bibliography

Mestrovic, S. G. (1997). *Postemotional Society*. London: Sage Publications.

Mestrovic, S. G. (1994). *The Balkanization of the West: The Confluence of Postmodernism and Postcommunism*. New York: Routledge.

Mestrovic, S. G. (1993). *The Barbarian Temperment: Toward a Postmodern Critical Theory*. New York: Routledge.