

# Sacred and profane in the pedagogical thought of Emile Durkheim\*

Tiago Ribeiro Santos<sup>1</sup>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0941-167X>

Ione Ribeiro Valle<sup>2</sup>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7496-3959>

## Abstract

The article analyzes lectures Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) prepared for two courses in the field of education, “*Pedagogical evolution*” and “*Moral education*”, which were posthumously published in 1938. As forms of exposition of Durkheim’s pedagogical thought, these lectures present a perspective of education that is both historical, emphasizing continuities and discontinuities of teaching in the West, and anthropological, based on the contemporary reality of the sociologist. Considering this constitutional dyad of Durkheim’s thought, based on concepts of the sacred and profane the article presents social tensions that reveal a conflictive perspective of educational reality. These tensions involve a less consensual sociological view of education and confer to practices such as reading, the moderate exercise of punishment, and the diffusion of knowledge, ambiguous roles particular to the duality of sacred and profane. Durkheim thus simultaneously reveals dramatic and dynamic attributes of his thought, without neglecting the moral nature of education.

## Keywords

Durkheim - Sacred - Profane - Moral education.

## Introduction

The year 2017 recalled the centenaries of the death of the sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858- 1917), marking a period of various academic activities around his thinking. In Brazil, the cycle of events, one *Hundred years without Durkheim*, organized by the Brazilian

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**1-** Universidade Regional de Blumenau (FURB), Blumenau, Santa Catarina, Brasil. Contato: [tiagoribeiro@furb.br](mailto:tiagoribeiro@furb.br).

\* Translated by Silvia Lacovacci. Contact: [siacovacci@gmail.com](mailto:siacovacci@gmail.com)

**2-** Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brasil. Contato: [ione.valle@ufsc.br](mailto:ione.valle@ufsc.br).



DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634201945184736>

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Center for Durkheimian Studies of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, promoted debates on the posterity of the sociologist's work; as well as a dossier in the journal *Sociologies* presented a "diversity of possible readings", among them that of a Durkheim "interlocutor of social theories, which has been constantly updated and appropriated as a source of inspiration or even the raw material of original theoretical syntheses "(WEISS, BIETHEN, 2017, p. 28), in particular, focused on *The Elemental Forms of Religious Life* [1912], the sociologist's last book published in his lifetime<sup>3</sup>.

The fact that Durkheim's legacy has innovative interpretations or that has been incorporated into the canons of sociology, however, does not exempt him from strong criticism. Raymond Aron (2000, p. 280), for example, attributed Durkheim's "professorial ingenuity" to the belief that it was "necessary to establish a morality inspired by the scientific spirit", as well as Theodor Adorno (2008, p. 118) that would oppose the sociologist who "revered the perceived quality of society even as something positive." Durkheim, therefore, perhaps more than classics like Weber, Marx, or Simmel, occupies a controversial place in the history of sociological thought, and whose (in)definitions have the virtue of stirring up lively debates around his work today.

The own construction of the author's thinking did not fail to participate in a controversial context and strong political disputes. Jones (2001, p. 44) writes that it is "only in the context of the Third Republic and the history of the French nineteenth century that debates on Durkheim's political positions can be judged" under certain confusions, if it is a supposed latent conservatism in his work. The conservatism of Durkheim's thinking, for Jones, concerns the preservation of the Republic, that is, the preservation of a politico-democratic form, capable of contemplating both republicans and socialists, in a dynamic and modern state of social relationships. This dynamism, perhaps as implicit as it is less remembered in the sociologist's thought, in turn, is opposed to conservatism which foresees the maintenance of hierarchies, social inequalities, and the traditional bourgeoisie of historically inherited privileges<sup>4</sup>. The continual hesitations around Durkheim's work could possibly be better understood from a seminal paper, *The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions*, published in 1914. Taking up explanatory principles of *The Elementary Forms*, the work presents a less harmonious perspective of social life, full with conflicting, dramatic and irresolute aspects that would be part of the tensions inherent to individuals. This dualism could be translated in terms of sacred and profane as a "constitutional duality of human nature" (DURKHEIM, 2013, p. 292), and as such belonged to life itself in society. The accent on this tension would be so strong that Durkheim attributed to it a motivating factor of social development, saying that everything makes one believe "that the place of effort will grow ever more with civilization" (DURKHEIM,

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**3-** This was also a work of interest to Lévi-Strauss (1993, p. 56), where, he writes, "for the first time, ethnographic observations, methodically analyzed and classified, no longer appeared as an accumulation of curiosity or aberrations, nor as vestiges of the past, and efforts were made to situate them within a systematic typology of beliefs and behaviors."

**4-** Durkheim's biography further reinforces the image of a sociologist in the midst of tensions. Durkheim descended from a long family line of rabbis (FILLLOUX, 1976), joined the École Normale Supérieure, a French institution responsible for training teachers, and then made his philosophy debut at the age of 24 in the modest town of Sens, 125 miles from Paris. The life of the young Durkheim brings together, in itself, elements capable of placing under suspicion the encompassing theories of socialization slightly attributed to his own authorship.

2013, p. 203) as individuals seek to remedy their conflicts by exercising particular forms of sacrifice.

Why should such efforts not be represented by Durkheim himself as an indefatigable scholar who has prepared magisterial seminars, including a fresco on education in the West and a kind of treatise on social anthropology of education? This question served as a background for the exploration of two of the author's courses, posthumously published as books: *L'évolution pédagogique en France* and *L'éducation morale*<sup>5</sup>, both offered at the Sorbonne at the turn of the twentieth century to students who would be responsible for teaching the next generations. Durkheim's relationship with education makes it not only an ideal way of treating education but, more tacitly, a diversity of dramas about its complex place in society. The dramatic character of education, when considered in terms of a tense relationship of forces and efforts, in turn, only seems to make more sense when tied to the moral issues around which individuals engage differently. The following item presents the methodological goals that serve a moral and Durkheimian perspective of education.

### **The method of approach: education as an ambiguous fact**

The method questions are fundamental to define the ways of approaching a study object. Durkheim's courses here would most likely have nothing to say about the sacred and the profane if education were not treated as an essentially moral fact. Moral facts, from the Durkheimian point of view, are distinguished by the duality of inspiring, in a single movement, a relation of proximity and distance: at the same time, they foresee constraints, sometimes accompanied by the feeling of respect or including fear, also inspire desire and search for self-improvement. This duality, although seemingly contradictory, Durkheim also finds in sacred objects not only because of the above-mentioned characteristics, but above all because of the difficult dissociation between moral and religious life which in history were "intimately bound up and utterly confounded in this way as, even today, we should be obliged to note that this close union subsists in most consciences" (DURKHEIM, 1967, p. 54).

Education, on the other hand, does not remain free of the same conflicting sense, so that Durkheim would have to face, conceptually, the very antinomy of the sacred-profane pair in dealing with teaching both in pedagogical evolution and in moral education. This is the central hypothesis of the article which, consequently, gives education in Durkheimian thought an equally ambiguous and antinomic character. The same can be observed when the author treats of the spirit the discipline - as element of the moral education - that acts like a particular form of violence against the human nature from coercion, limits, norms etc. The fact is that this violent aspect of the educational action in Durkheim's thought, at the same time, creates the very social conditions of existence of individuals. In this sense, the school could be thought of as one of the other institutions responsible for establishing a separation between these parts, insofar as, through its own qualities -

**5-** These courses, quite possibly because of the particularity of their textual genre, do not rely on documentary footnotes, generally and extensively employed in other works by Durkheim. This particularizes his text as to form, as well as to content, insofar as they are written to be heard by his audience.

contents, authorities, methods, punishments, and so on. - it seeks to preserve itself from profane interferences, as could be the case of grammar teaching through the reading of Latin poets, not the Bible.

This tension can be observed both in pedagogical evolution, by the formations and struggles that stimulate social transformations (Durkheim, 1976), and in moral education, when Durkheim scientifically engages in proposing a secular morality to French education. Pedagogical evolution and moral education, respectively, can be observed as well as works that contain both the duration of education from the Middle Ages to Modernity at the end of the nineteenth century and the depth of socio-anthropological foundations that suspect the thought educational background of the sociologist. Education is then presented as a social fact that counts on a nature and an evolution. Moral education in this sense, which uses a secular morality to be effective, could be understood as the culmination of a more sophisticated and more contemporary thought to Durkheim's context, moreover, linked to human dignity as a secularized form of value sacred. The education thus conceived enables Durkheim to work at the same time maintaining the needs and virtues which constitute the ambiguity of his thought. Durkheim noted that he used historiographical and ethnographic registers to define himself as a sociologist, so that his sociology of education would not remain exempt from the same resources. The tension between the sacred and the profane is thus a strategic form of introducing a certain drama, which seems inherent to the social reality itself when probed from multidisciplinary dimensions. This reality, which is composed of strong moral dimensions, becomes clearer when religion itself is inscribed in the realm of social phenomena. Religion is thus a form of social solidarity, although the term *religio* does not mean "that which unites men and gods, but what it takes care of so that they remain distinct" (AGAMBEN, 2007, p. 66). It is, however, instructive, since the sacred and the profane can be understood as forms of an essential separation which defines not only religions, but also interests, customs, morals, etc. This predicate is what makes both religions and different forms of social organizations a context that provides for dramas, efforts and sacrifices that are inscribed in a given social order.

The sacred, like its counterpart, the profane, does not mean, then, a superstition at the service of an illusion shared by individuals - such as Hume's conception of religions - but a manifestation of collective reciprocity that defines values in common. According to Durkheim (1990, p. 588), in *The Elementary Forms*, there are "two forms of the sacred: one prosperous and another nefarious," so that it is in the "possibility of transmutation that the ambiguity of the sacred consists." Paul Veyne (2011) with regard to religious transmutations (and to illustrate here the ambiguity of the sacred), tells of Christianity which, less than ten years after Christ's death, some preachers and even St. Peter boldly baptized uncircumcised, pagans. This fact, a scandal at the time, did not prevent St. Paul from following the same example, so that in three decades the openness to non-Jews of Christianized Judaism led to a separation between a sect of circumcised and a new religion, Christianity. The sacred, there, desecrates without denying another form of sacredness that comes to conquer a place in the society.

Sacred and profane, still, as concepts that "are always common to a plurality of men" (DURKHEIM, 2013, p. 294), therefore, should not be foreign to the plurality of

educational questions found throughout the course content of Durkheim. In this sense, the potentialities and ambiguities of the perspective of the sacred and the profane are seen not only as crucial components of Durkheim's educational thought, but also as strong ways of (re) inserting education into a dynamic and effervescent relation inherent to the human condition. Why should not its dynamism be compatible with the moral tenancies that education itself is capable of putting in play in the name of the sacred and the profane?

In order, then, to administer the proof that these tensions stimulate Durkheim's reflections, it is appropriate to draw at least some dramatic details of the reality presented by the French sociologist from *The Evolution and Education*. Social life as a drama does not dispense with performances whose definition of success or failure remains subject to a more or less established and historically variable milieu. Individuals, as will be the case of Abelard in the twelfth century and the teacher who educates morally for the twentieth century, are subject to coercive forces that obey the currents of ideas of their times. Durkheim thus reveals a myriad of social questions of education that must balance between a sacred that condenses values in common and a layman who does not ignore these same values but who opposes them confirming the very moral character of society.

## **Pedagogical separations**

From the perspective of the sacred, the history of teaching in Pedagogical Evolution could be understood as a history of separations. Let us explain: Durkheim understands from the beginning that there was something profane in the embryonic Catholic mission of educating the West. This was, therefore, the learning of reading that would allow pagan peoples to know God from access to divine Scripture. The fact is that young novices, subject to religious education, could naturally come to love letters more than to God himself; or more grammar and Latin poets than the sacred text. The history of education and the individuals responsible for teaching would thus, in the heart of a delimitation game and therefore separations, about what should and what should not be taught to pupils of the Church. Pedagogical evolution is thus pregnant with dramatic aspects insofar as the transmission of an education could disrupt its own goals.

Was not the propagation of the Judeo-Christian religion, after all, a tributary to translations rendered by the devotion of St. Jerome, who had translated the Bible from Hebrew into Latin in the sixth century<sup>6</sup>? What is important to emphasize here are its mediators, translators or, later, professors, indispensable to the propagation of a tradition and consequently of education. Durkheim (1938a, p. 44), then, attentive to a social organization subject to the tensions of the sacred and the profane, emphasizes that Pope Gregory repressed an archbishop of Vienna for having been in charge of teaching the grammar to young laymen. "The praises to Jupiter and the praises to Christ cannot come from the same mouth," wrote Gregory in a letter to the archbishop in the seventh century. What is appropriate now is to present tensions such as these which, through other modes of separation, mark the history of teaching from the Durkheimian point of view.

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**6-** Arns (2007), in *The Technique of the Book according to St. Jerome*, presents the meticulous process of confection and publication of the Bible.

## Around Abélard

Durkheim's attention to the figure of Pierre Abélard (1079-1142) is no less strategic. The latter could be considered a corporate dissident by virtue of too much "confidence in his genius" and the "natural impatience" that led him to teach in the city of Laon without the title of master (DURKHEIM, 1938a, p. 103). What could be considered today's illegal exercise of the function, for Abélard, cost the penalty of having to leave the city, thus meeting the regulations of a corporation of teachers already instituted at the time<sup>7</sup>. Abélard, in spite of his important role in the history of medieval philosophy, was more precisely a great target of stigmata. Regine Pernoud (1977, p. 112) recounts that he had been received in the city of Soissons in 1121, "based on stones from an indignant crowd", accusing the master theologian of heretics.

Durkheim, of course, has not seen in the qualities of a person like Abélard a motivating force for social evolution. What is important to emphasize is that interests similar to Abélard's, such as dialectical free discussion, would only find shelter in the constitution of the university. The pedagogical evolution, whether represented by the university or the school, throughout his work, thus enshrines social solutions that prevailed in certain contexts. The university that, in the form of a corporation, solves in Paris the existence of spaces favorable to dialectical discussions, would then be homologous to the *collège*, which sought to neutralize educational conditions of poverty and bewilderment of young students. The separation that had finally freed the masters from the vigilance of a bishop concerned with possible heresies is the same as that which offered students a place of education free from precariousness proper to the society of the time.

The few lines that Durkheim consecrates to the *collège* of Robert de Sorbon in the thirteenth century - which would later become *La Sorbonne* - are probably due to the fact that he held a minor position vis-à-vis the university at the time. The history of the University of Paris, we recall, is not primarily the history of the Sorbonne, which begins as a boarding school willing to welcome poor young people at the same time as teaching theology, as an outline of university life (DURKHEIM, 1975). The complexity of the French higher education system, whose nuances between "centers of excellence" and university cannot be neglected, could still be added here to the formation of the College of Royal Readers, created in Paris in 1530 by King Francis I (CHARLE; VERGER, 1996, p. 65), that centuries later, after the revolution, would be called what still today is known as *Collège de France*<sup>8</sup>. The history of teaching thus expresses its profane aspects whenever, apart, they are small groups that are defined by the autonomy they historically conquer.

Durkheim, on the other hand, uses the term corporations in order to highlight the embryonic social formations that exert influences on pedagogical evolution<sup>9</sup>. Corporations or professional groups occupy a privileged place in the sociologist's thinking, since

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**7-** Abélard goes to the city of Laon, present region of Hauts-de-France, attracted by the reputation of the dialectic courses of Anselmo. But what he finds there is a "tree full of leaves, but without fruit, a bonfire from which there is much smoke and no light" (MULLIN, 1994, p. 260).

**8-** The creation of the College of Royal Readers, Lefranc writes (1893, p. 107), would have happened "without noise, without apparatuses, almost in secret, so as not to alarm the Sorbonne" which, in contrast to the Collège, realized through the Latin language.

**9-** Para uma análise da noção de corporação na obra de Durkheim sugere-se a leitura do artigo de Jean-Claude Gautier (1994).

neither the political society as a whole nor the State can carry out their functions. “The activity of a profession can only be effectively regulated by a group close enough to its own profession, knowing its operations very minutely, feeling all the needs and being able to follow all its variations” (DURKHEIM, 1999, p. X). Le Goff (1992, p. 99), he adds, underlines the historiographical difficulties of color in the Middle Ages, since “their origins are almost always obscure” and “their evolution is uneven, depending on the cities and the trade.” What is important to keep in mind is that “the body-rage organization is a kind of police within the trade and between offices, where citizens and foreigners enter” as well as “place of professional solidarity” (LE GOFF, 1992, p. 99) that can gather groups of butchers, millers, fighters and also teachers.

The Durkheim Teachers’ Corporation represents as soon as a movement towards the attainment of autonomy. In the thirteenth century, for example, this corporation had achieved so much independence from the Nôtre Dame Chancellery that it maintained a monopoly over the granting of master’s degrees, as well as prerogatives on excommunications to which they could be subject. Sacrifice in the name of teaching was thus represented by a compensatory separation which, in turn, was ignored by Abelard in his day.

### Confinement and purpose

The corporations hitherto quoted would not, however, be free from suspicion. These could undermine doctrinal aspects of teaching expected by the bishopric. The *disputations*, logical discussions that, in the end, should consecrate a winner, occupied a place in the sociability of the young. This fact, although it stimulated sagacious and logical spirits or provided public spectacles of rhetoric, also gained right to the city, producing agitations and certain social coloring. The sixteenth and fifteenth centuries, on the other hand, would be the scene of another invention that occurs in parallel to the formation of universities: the *collège*, that is, a trusting institution, which separated students in a double way.

First, in a context in which students represented a greater danger to the social order of cities. Roger Bacon said that “students roamed the streets of Paris armed, bothering with their shouts the quiet of the bourgeoisie, mistreating harmless passers-by” (DURKHEIM, 1938a, p. 147). Secondly, they are responsible for involving children and young people in an unceasing education free from the rest of the world. These mutations would then have everything to change the forms of sociability. The students in the *collèges* no longer traveled to the professors - usually on the left bank of the Senna river in Paris, or on Rue du Fouarre<sup>10</sup>. The teachers were now going to meet their students, who lived inside the *collèges* themselves. School life is conceived as a boarding school life, centralizing the pedagogical action on the students by a regime that fights dispersions and bad influences.

Durkheim (1938a, p. 158) did not fail to criticize, however, the French society which, according to him, had lost “the taste for free life, different, with accidents and irregularities

**10-** It is so called because of the fact that “the students listened to the masters sitting on straw, reeds or hay, because the slabs could give rise to forms of pride among the young, [...] as it is said in a letter of Cardinals Jean de Blandry and Gilles Rycelin, addressed to the University of Paris, dated June 5, 1366” (MOULIN, 1994, p. 68).

that it would imply". The particular order of the French spirit, which had centered on the universal powers that gave rise to the organization of *collèges*, would therefore be a historical constant. This would also be a way of emphasizing that this spirit of ordination conditions severe disciplinary violence within the walls and that whip (fouet) represented, among others, a pedagogical instrument of moral regulation. The Renaissance was that it would now be responsible for constructing a new form of social separation, to which the sociologist could not be indifferent.

### *Criticism of the pedagogical renaissance*

The term Middle Ages is not so fair from the historical point of view. It represents as much a gap between Antiquity and modern civilizations as a construction from the point of view of the Light - hence the term "age of darkness" - which obfuscates important inventions such as glasses, compass, and the university itself. The question revolves around different classifications in relation to which Durkheim (1938a, p. 220) does not remain exempt: The Middle Ages would be for him the period of childhood on its way to full youth, represented by the Renaissance. The "admirable fecundity of school organization" (DURKHEIM, 1938a, p. 44) would not then be a form of teaching matured by the Middle Ages, such as corporations and collèges?

Durkheim's strategy now goes through the analysis of pedagogical doctrines whose empirical access is facilitated by the vulgarization of the book. Durkheim can thus dwell on the work of Rabelais, finding a gigantic teaching based on an insatiable appropriation of knowledge. The work of Rabelais, in the eyes of Durkheim, is a measureless stimulus to erudition, in which the book bears a sacred authority not unlike the aura which it maintained in university teaching. What is important to retain is both the belief in the assimilation of knowledge and a renewed aspiration to undo the frontiers of specializations represented by classical university courses such as theology, medicine, law, and the liberal arts.

Erasmus, like Rabelais, for Durkheim, would belong to the "currents of opinion" (DURKHEIM, 2009, p. 40) of the Pedagogical Renaissance as a "force endowed with intensity that can vary according to periods, countries" and, for in turn, crystallize in the taste for encyclopedic knowledge. This force, which consists of established beliefs and practices, comprised, for example, preceptors who ought to have erudition not so much in virtue of pleasure as in Rabelais, but by virtue of acting through the selection of works that would be read by his pupils. Erasmus thus developed a kind of censorship ethic in that it freed young people from the need to have the same level of cultural consumption as their masters. Erasmus's position is not strange if we consider that writings on etiquette were also among his occupations, perpetuating a classic division between cultural elites willing to favor political elites.

The fact is that for Durkheim (1938a, p. 67) the sixteenth century was a period of "pedagogical nihilism" represented by the figure of such pedagogues. Durkheim understood that the transmission of codes of civility-the very ones that would serve as an analysis material for Norbert Elias (1994) later-was intended for as few individuals



as those belonging to the noblest and most privileged circles of the society of his time. Erasmus, according to Durkheim, when he valued the refinement of spirit and dilettantism, closed his eyes to the conditions of universality of the same teaching. Education lost its practical character and thus became a vice rather than a virtue. Durkheim, therefore, curiously, did not fail to credit to Scholasticism, to which Erasmus opposed, something more realistic and social linked to the necessities of existence of the own society of its time. The relations between classical and medieval sociology, as Nisbet (1984) wrote, appear there in the form of recollection of a relatively more plausible past about society. The transformations bequeathed by Modernity were somewhat chilling, and sociologists like Durkheim were not immune to them.

## From pedagogical ordering

The analysis carried out so far has presented three cases in which the sacred and profane values manifest themselves from the Durkheimian point of view. Abelard, the *collège*, Rabelais and Erasmus were thus representatives of counter-movements of insubordination that strain the moral forces of different epochs. Durkheim, however, remains a component of the moral forces of his time, and it is therefore appropriate to emphasize his emergence as a thinker willing to concede education, in moral education, in the name of the sacredness of a society.

### The “*evil of the infinite*” or tragic starting point

The will has something mysterious. It manifests itself as power, mood, energy, and so on. that for Durkheim it is better to neutralize its force than its contingent and irrational aspect. Discipline serves this task, insofar as it is expressed through socially recognized norms, regularizing group life. However, the repressive character of the discipline, already presented from the *collèges*, would be too poor a face. What interests Durkheim are the virtues of a discipline that can establish collective and solidary relations. Discipline involves something essentially good in making social life possible from collectively shared rules. It could still be maintained, as individuals sacrificed their individual interests in the name of group ideals. These same groups, on the other hand, would offer desirable forms of existence precisely because they can be limited and objective. Thus, the limits are positive, because they shape things so that they also become interchangeable in a regime of differentiated material and symbolic exchanges.

Durkheim would not be far from reiterating the conditions of solidity of social ties which, in turn, would prevent the production of anomie sometimes expressed in suicide rates, a major interest of the sociologist in *Suicide* [1897]. The anomie, represented literarily by the sociologist as evil of the infinite (Lamartine’s expression<sup>11</sup>), would therefore

**11-** Durkheim (2000, p. 359) uses the following passage from Lamartine’s novel *Raphael*: “The languor of all things around me was a marvelous consonance with my own languor. She raised it, comforting her. I plunged into the abyss of sadness. But this sadness was alive, full of thoughts, of impressions, of communications with the infinite, of dark light in my soul so that I did not wish to be subtracted from it. Man’s disease, but disease whose own feeling is an attractive rather than a pain, and in which death resembles a voluptuous fade into infinity. It was resolved from now on to give myself entirely to her, to kidnap me from any society that might distract me from her and to envelop myself in silence, solitude and coldness,

be a collective sentiment whose possibility of occurrence should be avoided by the sociologist. Durkheim, for that matter, uses a counter-deductive hypothesis based on the process of social differentiation. Differentiation would inevitably produce integration, as interdependencies between individuals increased in modern contexts. Individuals would need more and more of each other and therefore their social positions should be occupied in order to respond to the demands of ever emerging material and symbolic clienteles. These individuals would thus be called to exercise their professions with excellence (in the sphere of medicine, arts, politics, etc.) at the same time that their wills would be fulfilled.

By the same term, Durkheim also invests against the possibility of a certain nihilism, just as he had invested against the Renaissance pedagogical nihilism in developing an idea of an integrated society. Evil would therefore be virtually present in the face of integration. Hence Durkheim was able to resort to moral education (secular and non-religious) in order to attribute a more solid content to the volatile forms of Modernity. The evil which represents the profane character is the same as Durkheim propelled to the sacred task of conceptualizing a social nature that would rise above the individuals, establishing strong marks. Men and women would be reconciled with their sacred and profane natures under a state of finite social life, enlightened by scientific knowledge. They then have categories to exist; orders by which they can ascend and, although they may renounce religion, could hardly renounce a form of devotion to society.

### **Punishments and human dignity**

But social life has something indomitable and an astounding tale about the evil of the infinite (DURKHEIM, 1938b, p. 35) would not be enough to produce social integration. Durkheim is certainly far from presenting a discipline based on fear, although he fears that everything that may possibly remain outside his idea of society. The fact is that Durkheim could not help coping with a delicate issue: punishment as a *sui generis* component of school life. The ethnographic resources that he mobilizes to do so serve to define this particular aspect of punishment, since, in documents about the education of primitive peoples, “discipline appears with great docility in the majority of cases” (DURKHEIM, 1938b, p. 154). This verification finds school punishment early as an exceptional invention of complex societies, whether it comes from the discipline or a response to the temporal urgencies of their contexts (in the formation of military personnel, for example), or that they have a public opinion that is sensitive to violence in general.

School life in the context of Durkheim is leaked from modern judgments willing to condemn violence. This context makes possible the suspicion of school punishment being possible without demoralizing the very moral reality that Durkheim conceptualized. The sense of punishment must be analyzed according to the sociologist’s perspective between the frontiers of the sacred and the profane. What is important is, therefore, to elaborate ideas of punishments deprived of the violence that until then had achieved a more or less

in the midst of the world that I would meet then; my spiritual isolation was a shroud through which I no longer wanted to see men, but only the nature of God. “

normal place in the school universe. As such, the school is visibly conceived as a space subject to coercive forces from other contexts, groups or corporations, in which Durkheim inscribes himself as a scientist, who re-affirm integrating ideals that constitute his own institution. This school condition is what, in turn, allows the sociologist to propose punishments based on the deprivation of recreational activities and the accomplishment of additional tasks.

The teacher then subsumes ideals integrated into the school, and must punish without hesitation, through a prudence that does not violate sacred values regarding the dignity of the students, nor prevents the disciplinary rule from losing its authority through the respectful image that he himself represents. Durkheim makes the school, therefore, an atom capable of being reduced to the image of the teacher who, in turn, represents the school institution through his gestures, body and personality. The connotations closest to the sacred - human, moderate, prudent, fair, strong, etc. - thus adhere to their social role, which sums up an ideal reality. The lessons of moral education serve not only the moralization of students. The master is also an object of attention, after all, he would be the custodian of what is most sacred.

### **Aesthetic education and history**

The analysis so far has forced us to return to the beginning, recovering from pedagogical evolution something that can also be found in moral education. The first work informs that the reading of Latin poets, by an audience of young people initiated to the Bible, should count on moderation and strong attention of the clergymen. This prudence is homologous to that of the sociologist about literature in school. The essential separation takes place between an aesthetic education back to the contemplative life (and therefore detached from the serious needs of social life) and a historical education focused on active life. Thus, literature, which belongs to the domain of the imaginary and the fictional, must be balanced with the realm of social reality that constitutes the moral itself.

In the *division of social work* [1893], Durkheim already recognized that artistic groups would be able to attain some autonomy in the form of corporations, producing works that would represent a kind of over excess disconnected from the seriousness of life. According to Miller (2004), art still holds two other meanings: as practical action (experience acquired by the pedagogue in relation to his students, for example); and as a means of connecting with the religious life, which involves dance, painting, music, etc. and, at the same time, expresses the seriousness of one's own social life. The function of moral education is to reconnect modern art derived from the division of labor and the integrity of school life. This does not prevent us from situating the teacher, once again, as mediator between the sacred and the profane.

The social division of labor therefore imposes on the school an organizational effort. What is convenient for her is to find a place for literature that neutralizes her profane virtues and that avoids temptations and disconnections from social and historical reality. "Art, let us say, makes us see ourselves in an imaginary environment and for this reason it withdraws us from the reality of the concrete, individual and collective beings that make

up this same reality,” writes Durkheim (2009, p. 333). The school does not necessarily have to oppose this reality, but rather has to resort to a form of *sui generis* treatment, expressing its own singularity as a social institution that moderates culture.

The reasons why Durkheim offers his students a great fresco of the history of education in the West thus seem clearer. The demonstration of the real is, therefore, given by historical knowledge itself, which occupies a crucial place in the sociologist's thinking. The real does not correspond, however, only to social needs - from which its functionalist aspect usually flows - but also to residual elements of the past. The residual is seen as that which remains somewhere in history and that it behooves Durkheim to bring back to social life, giving it a privileged place. Therefore, the inventions of the Middle Ages, such as the university and the collèges, represented objects of a genetic approach. These were responsible for bequeathing structures and modes of thought; just as Christian education was a learning based on a literate culture that should balance between sacred and profane readings.

This balance is what, in short, could be able to give to educational thinking something essentially dramatic. After all, the diffusion of education, which is manifested by teachers, books and other means, seeks precisely to protect itself against a diffuse, indefinite, confused education. Education thus reveals its paradoxical character from a tension proper to its constitution in the West. Was not this paradox the same as condemning Sócrates for his supposed distortion of Greek youth? The conflictive image of education also concerns the image of a teacher, presented by Durkheim, who moderates the use of literature through history. The educational phenomenon in Durkheim's thinking thus hesitates between historically observable actions and constraints, predicting tensions between individuals. Thus, education becomes the opening of a door to a room which, however, we do not know whether it is light or dark.

## **Final notes**

Durkheim's educational thinking is inherent in the tenets between the sacred and the profane. Durkheim discovers that from the cathedrals schools, the diffusion of education should deal with the contingencies (or misunderstandings) of a diffuse education, that is, an education with dispersed and heterogeneous purposes. The history of education could therefore be read as a history of beacons or separations that seek to guide ways of teaching, making their action subject to a pedagogy thought to match the complexities of their time.

Caring for profane Latin literatures - different from reading the Bible - symbolize, for example, one among other beacons that could repeatedly be imposed in other historical contexts. The attention given here to the sacred-profane binomial can contribute to undo certain misunderstandings not only about the educational sociology of Durkheim, but on an idea of human nature that assumes a constant coming and going of beacons, separations, which reaffirm the plastic qualities proper to the social being.

Durkheim's educational thinking, in this sense, hardly remains open to confusion when his particular method of observing history is ignored. The intellectual disposition

to go back to the past in order to think about the present and the future, even if it may sound contradictory, would not be a sociologically fruitful contradiction, leading to reflections on the role of the profane in improving and education and culture? The history of education in the West might never be exhaustive about decisive social roles, such as scientific vulgarizations, translations (albeit rudimentary), or lay and uneducated teachers (because they did not know Latin), which, however inadequate from the point of view of an idea of a social order, did not fail to contribute to the diffusion of education by moving it from one place to another.

The function of education to use the plasticity of individuals themselves in order to establish a complex bond of social integration between them can still be reinterpreted from ideas of society always open to scientific debate. Societies that carry education, for example, to integrate their individuals from a dominant cultural arbitrary, represent, therefore, only one among other ways of looking at society itself. The return to Durkheim's work, otherwise, in the face of the strict relations between education and society, becomes a way of (re) introducing some empirical conflict to the scientific consensus that can often make a flat-rate mark of its heuristic virtues. The tensions between the sacred and the profane are thus no less an invitation to explore education from anthropological and historical angles, areas to which Durkheim did not hesitate to resort to defining himself as a sociologist and at the same time as pedagogue of his time.

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*Received on: August 20<sup>th</sup> 2017*

*Revised on: February 20<sup>th</sup> 2018*

*Approved on: April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018*

**Tiago Ribeiro Santos** is a visiting professor at the Regional University of Blumenau (FURB) linked to the Postgraduate Program in Education, Blumenau, Santa Catarina, Brazil. PhD in education from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), with an internship at René Descartes University, Paris V.

**Ione Ribeiro Valle** is a professor at the Center for Educational Sciences at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). Researcher PQ of CNPq - Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. Coordinator of the Pierre Bourdieu Sociological Research Laboratory (LAPSB).