Social Disintegration and the Anchor of Subjectivity: Theoretical Analysis Based on the Perspective of Social Solidarity

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Abstract: *In his study of the phenomenon of suicide, Emile Durkheim found that the decline of religious cohesion brought about a weakening of solidarity and faith, which then led to a series of social problems. As an Establishment, the religious community is not merely an oppressive force, but also the field on which the master-slave dialectic is hosted. By virtue of its transcendental nature, the Establishments are able to provide individuals with an anchor of subjectivity while giving them a sense of transcendence over life and death. On this basis, Durkheim sees the vocational community as a remedy for social disintegration and the reconstitution of a conscience collective following the disintegration of the religious order.*

Keywords: *Social Solidarity; Subjectivity; Establishment; Conscience Collective*

1. The Mechanism of Social Reorganization

For Durkheim, the morals and laws of society were constructed on the basis of common feelings and conscience collective, which depended on a solid social order. In pre-modern societies, social order depended on commonalities in life, work and activity, and the conscience collective given by such commonalities became the glue of social order. With the division of labor brought about by social development, the conscience collective of commonality were gradually replaced by a rational and passive interdependence, and the Enlightenment and the French Revolution liberated people from the unequal social structure of the feudal hierarchy in a legal sense. However, Durkheim argued that this structure was also providing society with a system of integration, and he found that feudal society, with Catholicism as its bond, possessed a solidarity that could not be separated[1]. In contrast, the free will and thinking brought about by the protestant reformation and the Enlightenment could instead have a negative effect on faith and solidarity, which in turn had a range of consequences such as rising suicide rates and social moral decay. He sets out a series of thought-provoking conclusions: the tendency to commit suicide increases as individuals acquire more knowledge. When religious organization is disorganized and the religious cohesion of society is weakened, there is a desire to acquire knowledge and a significant increase in suicidal tendencies[2]. Durkheim defines this phenomenon, which is triggered by the disintegration of the social order and thus by free thinking, as egoistic suicide, reflecting the weakening of social norms and institutions that bind members of society and the reduction of social cohesion.

On the macroscopic level, the study of conscience collective is inseparable from the perspective of identity and subjectivity. In the social order mediated by language, individual is regarded as a part of the community which is constructed by all people around him, in this way he gains different positions, this can be summarized as social roles individuals assume in the process of socialization and interaction. Identity is the process of internalizing the social role into self-cognition and self-evaluation. In many cases, identity is simply and directly explained as sameness: because in the social order, all kinds of knowledge of the self are based on the benchmark of the other. The thinking about what the similarities between me and the other are and which kinds of group the self belongs to has created each distinct group. Group members are more or less alike, and it is this similarity that makes a group different from other groups. Each identity is based on a specific basis of difference, and such differences define our group boundaries. This combination of similarity and difference constitutes the basic form of identity. In the research of Durkheim, religion can function as a highly perceived and mobilizable basis of difference, religious community naturally becomes an identity group with extremely clear boundaries, thus it can be regarded as a powerful glue of conscience collective. In pre-modern society, the religious community anchored individual subjectivity and delineated the attribution of individual self-identification.

The Enlightenment re-established man as the center of all creations in the form of law, and the ensuing protestant reformation gave religious doctrine more scope for individual interpretation and thus dismantled the authority of the religious community with the Pope at its core. Religion originally provided a simple and straightforward moral norm, but after the authority of God had diminished or even dissipated, people were unable to find any prior identity group to redefine their subjectivity and became lost in the thought of identity, which further explains the growing suicidal tendencies discussed by Durkheim. To sum up: the Enlightenment and the division of labor brought about the decline of feudal institutions and religious communities, which in turn manifested itself in a social disorganization of the moral order and a weakened sense of religious commonality, and this was reflected at the individual level in the myth of subjectivity.

2. The Establishments and the Master-slave Dialectic

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel states that the human self-consciousness is always in a spontaneous master-slave relationship: the essence of the subject-object relationship is a struggle to the death to place the subject in the position of master, and this master-slave relationship is based on the spontaneous recognition of both parties[3]. The struggle for recognition has been the primary motor driving human history[4]. Alexandre Kojeve builds on Hegel's explanation: all human's anthropogenetic desire that generates Self-Consciousness is, finally, a function of the desire for recognition. Man tries to get what is, from a biological point of view, completely useless because it is the object of other desires[5]. Specifically, this "recognition" implies achieving a sense of superiority in the spiritual realm over others, and thus gaining their approval.

In the pre-modern world before the Enlightenment, master-slave dialectic manifested itself as feudal system in European society, that is, through hereditary and cultural ways to determine the primacy of the master-slave status. There is no longer need for the aristocracy to gain their master status by competition, war or any other struggling form, because the social system and cultural background has ensured their superiority once they were born. However, Kojeve regarded that there would be an eventual ending to the master-slave struggle. When this desire for recognition is realized in everyone, it is the end of history. In his view, the beginning of the Enlightenment, the outbreak of the French Revolution, and the popularization of *the Declaration of The Rights of Man* by Napoleon and his cavalry throughout Europe are the moments of the end of history[6]. It is well known that the core of *the Declaration of The Rights of Man* is equality under the law, which means that Hegel's master-slave dialectic is terminated by the law. The desire for master status was given to everyone by the law, and the fall of the feudal aristocracy wiped out class distinctions. At this point, with the advent of universal and equal mutual recognition, human history entered the final stage[7].

However, Kojeve 's argument was confronted with the test brought by the changes of social development. The master-slave dialectic is a kind of thinking structure existing in the spiritual field of human beings. As an expression of individual desire and reality, the master-slave dialectic is not bound by law. The question is whether it is possible to eliminate this structure, which must prevail in the confrontation between subject and object, by giving everyone a master status at the legal level. From Durkheim's perspective, the Enlightenment and the development of capitalism were a series of events that opened the prelude to modern society, it also marked a brief shift in the main thread of the social structure, that is, from a feudal hierarchy that represented a predisposition to status to an economic stratification in which money was paramount. *The Declaration of The Rights of Man* alone could not even eradicate the deep-rooted cultural notions of hierarchy from people's minds, leaving the individuals living in this era in a dark background where the feudal hierarchy of inequality by birth and the economic stratification and lust for profit coexisted. In other words, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution did not literally put an end to history as Hegel had predicted, nor did they eliminate the operation of the master-slave dialectic in the spiritual realm. The Declaration only brought formal equality and freedom to Europeans on a legal level, but this hard-won spirit entered into a deeper and more subtle inequality and unfreedom with the rise of the capitalist mode of production, and the master-slave dialectic began to flourish in the economic stratification of capitalism.

For the radical leftists, their core aspiration is the pursuit of progress and social change, and further to liberate people from all the structures of inequality that dominates society, that is, the Establishment. However, according to the above discussion, the Establishment is the field in which the master-slave dialectic operates spontaneously, constructed by generations of individuals over a long period of history. As in the case of the French Revolution, even if the revolutionaries eliminate some established unequal social structures, the operation of the master-slave dialectic in the individual mental domain will not

disappear, but will operate again in other fields and create new forms of Establishments. It is easy to see through Durkheim's research that the Establishment, as a collection of unequal social structures, is not only beneficial to privileged groups. The Establishment has developed a deep attraction of value over a long period of history, which is due to the fact that it is external to the person but above the person.

For Kojeve, All the desires of an animal are to preserve its life. Human desire, therefore, must win out over this desire for preservation[8]. Individuals spontaneously seek some sublime meaning and value beyond their basic physical needs in their lives. Whether it is the state, the church, the patriarchal clan, the military and political parties, these Establishments provide a system of meaningfulness beyond life and death for the individuals of different ranks within them[9]. When an Establishment collapses under the impact of an external force, the individual not only loses the coordinates on which his subjectivity is based, but also suffers the trauma of his system of meaningfulness, even though the Establishment itself may be full of decay, ignorance and inequality. This is why the disintegration of the feudal system and the loosening of religious communities in European societies under the combined impact of the Enlightenment and the Reformation brought about a decline in social solidarity and moral sentiment.

To sum up: for individuals, the Establishment is not merely an oppressive force, but also the arena in which the master-slave dialectic is hosted and which provides the individual with meaning beyond life and death. The struggle for recognition as superior to others in the hierarchy provides space for the widespread irrationality and inequality of the Establishment. In this way, the Establishment is crucial to the formation of social solidarity.

3. Otherworldly Concerns and the Transcendence of the Establishments

As mentioned above, egoistic suicide is caused by excessive individuation, and Durkheim defines it as altruistic suicide when it comes to insufficient individuation. Altruistic suicide tends to occur when there is a high degree of institutional integration, where the individual ends his or her life because the reputation of the institution as a whole has been damaged, and where death is either imposed as a social responsibility or promoted as an honor. However, a high degree of establishment integration increases the rate of altruistic suicide on the one hand, and reduces the incidence of self-interested suicide on the other. Durkheim analyses the impact of three types of institutional integration on altruistic suicide: religious society, domestic society and political society, concentrating activity toward a single end, at least temporarily causing a stronger integration of society[10]. In a French society in transition, Durkheim was keenly aware of the decline of the traditional establishment and the trend towards social disintegration, which also led him to think about immortality.

For Anthony Smith, such thinking belongs to the realm of otherworldly concerns: the individual's imagination of meaningfulness and value after death, an imagination that brings the individual a mooring beyond the present world. In the face of catastrophe, religion and nationalism as Establishment translate predestination into the continuity of life from a divine and secular perspective respectively, suggesting the possibility of immortality. Establishments have the function of overcoming personal oblivion, and identification with it in a secular era is the surest way to surmount the finality of death and ensure a measure of personal immortality[11]. Based on ties such as blood and religion, the Establishments have a glorious past and a bright future, and individuals can pour their emotions into the Establishments and find solace in the memory of future generations. It does not matter if one's name is forgotten: the efforts and values of the individual are organically integrated into the Establishment, and the worship of the establishment is in a sense transformed into the worship of the individual.

Even though the Enlightenment liberated the individual from the confining parts of the Establishments, it could not give him otherworldly concerns. While there is an oppressive power structure and inequality in the Establishments, it is also this inequality and oppression that gives the Establishments its transcendence. In a way, the power structure in the Establishments is not similar to the rule of the sultanate: there is a tyrant figure over the other individuals. Rather, there is often an entity in the Establishments that transcends and distances itself from all individuals: God in the religious community, the national imaginary in the nation-state, the scholar-tyrant in the academic community, and the vested interests in the Establishments use the authority conferred by this entity alone to exercise power. Weber's theory of authority also confirms this thesis: the rational-legal procedures, charismatic leaders and traditional practices that respectively correspond to each of the three kinds of authority exercise their power from the authorization of transcendent entities. It is the transcendence of these entities in relation to the individual that allows them to simultaneously bind and give meaning to the individual.

After the Enlightenment and the Reformation liberated the individual from much of the

Establishments, the individual, though gaining control of subjectivity from the Establishments, could no longer gain recognition from the transcendent, let alone access the system of meaningfulness provided by the Establishments. In this sense, the emancipation of the individual represents a subject-object relationship in which the object is henceforth only on an equal footing with the subject. This is where a return to Hegel's master-slave dialectic reveals why the individual cannot be satisfied with merely communicating, interacting and evaluating with other equal individuals, but must seek recognition in a transcendent entity that is distant from the individual and further mediates interaction with other individuals. The transcendental entity has the Performative Force, that is the power to give validity and universality to recognition[12]. For the individual, recognition from a transcendent entity ensures that what one believes is also what others believe, thus one can gain a sense of identity in perception.

Existentialism offers a humanistic interpretation of subjectivity, which means man should replace God with reason and so that he can make himself his own vane[13]. The individual should construct meaning spontaneously and use reason as a sword to open up the broad path of necessity. Structuralist scholars such as Levi-Strauss and Lacan have critiqued this interpretation from an ontological perspective. They aim to find meaning in the connections between elements: in the study of Levi-Strauss marital exchange relations in primitive societies, he found that language, as a symbolic carrier, forms the basis of all grand human social relations. The structure of language is the surface of the unconscious, which forms the deep structure of society, on which social structures such as kinship and mythology are built[14]; Lacan proposed that "The unconscious structured like a language", that is the human unconscious is also constituted by a system of differences, just like language. The structuralist school sees existentialism as a futile attempt to construct meaning for itself, since meaning can only be given by a transcendent thing, a symbolic order modelled on the structure of language. The emancipation of the individual also means the elimination of the power of the previously empowered, since a completely free individual would no longer have anything external to evaluate and gaze upon, and evaluation from other equal individuals would not guarantee its breadth and validity.

To sum up: the Establishments are able to provide the individual with a value meaning that is beyond life and death, such as otherworldly concerns. The reason for this is the transcendence of the Establishment itself in relation to the individual, and it is the broad and effective recognition that this transcendence brings that gives it the ability to evaluate and empower the individual.

4. Professional Moralities and Social Solidarity in the Post-Enlightenment Period

In summary, the Establishments has an important role to play in the construction of social solidarity on a spiritual level. For Durkheim, he was not critical of the emancipatory spirit of the Enlightenment per se, but was committed to the problem of the disintegration of society from the collapsing of pre-modern Establishments such as religious communities. From Durkheim's perspective, society is built on a common moral foundation rather than on the egotistical reason proposed by Hobbes and Rousseau[15]. Furthermore, society cannot be constructed through rational contracts, as each participant must spontaneously abide by the contract for the agreement to be established. Durkheim establishes the primacy of common emotions over rational contracts, arguing that the construction of the modern nation-state depends on pre-contractual solidarity. In contrast to the feudal system that had existed in Europe for almost a millennium, Durkheim argued that religious societies and some of the post-Enlightenment institutions, such as nation-state societies and political societies, had to reinvent conscience collective in times of social transformation. He lived at a time when European society was rife with moral decay, the worldliness of money and the breakdown of social ethics, all of which could be considered the consequences of social disintegration and the inability of individuals to anchor their subjectivity. He attributes the increase in the number of suicides to the growing social unrest, which led to this tendency towards collective melancholy.

For this reason, Durkheim argues that the most effective solution to social disintegration and the reconstitution of conscience collective is the construction of a professional morality in a modern society with a high degree of social division of labor, to replace the pre-modern common emotions that had been dispersed by the wind, for which Durkheim was criticized as a political conservatives[16]. In the context of the division of labor, a new form of professional morality could ensure the attachment of individuals to the vocational community while strengthening the solidarity of society as a whole. For Durkheim, the vocational community, with its collective identity and traditional practices, was able to exercise its rights and responsibilities to the full, thereby reshaping social morality and maintaining social solidarity. The professional moralities he advocated aimed at transforming a post-Enlightenment society into a morally degraded one and reconstructing a fair and just social morality. For Durkheim, the significance of the

social division of labor lies in the transformation of the solid bonding of people in the workplace into a connection that is not solely for economic gain: the importance of this connection lies in the moral significance of the bonds it creates. The division of labor strengthens the heterogeneity of individuals while increasing their interdependence, and the moral identity formed by people united together is in fact the basis of the new social order.

Durkheim criticizes the contracted society consisting of each fully emancipated individual, an atomized community with the individual as the smallest unit that cannot anchor the subjectivity of the individual as a transcendental entity. On this basis, he affirms the positive role of religious societies, nation-state and vocational community and other Establishments in reconfiguring the field of conscience collective. Durkheim's proposition resembles a driving force to breaking and establishing: the individual, liberated from the shackles of the pre-modern feudal system. In a balance of rights and responsibilities, individuals should also pursue equality among three aspects: existence value, spirit and morality, and thus to integrate themselves within the system of interaction between the individual and society driven by the ethics of public morality. The spirit of emancipation of the Enlightenment made the individual free from the feudal system and all pre-modern communities, but it does not mean that the individual should live in an atomized form in a fragile community maintained by contracts. The professional moralities of the new era should enable the individual to be disembedded from the pre-modern Establishment and re-embedded in society. Only in this way can the individual find the seeds of a new life in the flood of history.

5. Conclusions

The individual's desire to be superior to others and to achieve recognition, this allows for the widespread existence of unequal elements in the Establishments, which also provides individuals with a system of meaningfulness that dominates the direction of their lives, continually achieving the integrative effect of social solidarity. It is the nature of the Establishment itself, which transcends and distances itself from all individuals, that ensures the universality and validity of recognition, it further locates the subjectivity of individuals and gives them a sense of identity. The brutal destruction of the Establishments will only create an atomized society where individuals will be lost in the myth of subjectivity, which in turn will give rise to a series of social problems such as the breakdown of rituals and morality. However, this does not mean that the unreasonable elements in this structure should be affirmed, but people should actively search for possible paths to break down the old Establishments, such as the feudal hierarchy, and then explore the optimal solution for social integration after it has been destroyed.

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