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Q3(c)

What is the difference between anomie in Merton and Durkheim? Explain.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- What is the difference between anomie in Merton and **Durkheim**? Explain
- Keep the explanation within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Durkheim**: anomie as weak regulation and unbounded desire, seen in **suicide** and rapid differentiation.
- **Merton**: anomie as strain between cultural success and class-rationed means.

Adaptations include **innovation** and ritualism.

Indian exams often fit Merton; market crashes can still fit **Durkheim**.

They share a normative vocabulary, not the same mechanism.

Introduction

Both use anomie for a mismatch in the normative order. **Emile Durkheim** meant weak regulation of passions and goals. Robert K. Merton meant a strain between culturally prescribed success and unequal legitimate means. The difference is regulation versus structured opportunity.

Body

Durkheim's anomie

- In The **Division of Labour**, anomie is insufficient moral regulation when differentiation is too fast.
- **In Suicide**, anomic **suicide** follows **boom, crash, or marital shock**: goals become unbounded.
- The problem is a missing ceiling on desire, a social fact of deregulation.

Merton's anomie

- In Social Structure and Anomie, American culture stresses money success for all.
- The class structure rations education and jobs.
- **Innovation**, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion are adaptations, with conformity as the fifth.
- Crime as **innovation** is a sociological, not a biological, outcome.

The difference

- **Durkheim**: collapse or weakness of rules that limit goals.
- **Merton**: rules of success stay strong while means are blocked; strain is built into stratification.
- **Durkheim** worries about boundless desire. Merton worries about a bound success ethic plus unequal doors.
- **Indian exam and informal-labour worlds often look Mertonian**: huge success talk, narrow formal means. Agrarian price shock can still look Durkheimian.

Flow diagram

Durkheim -> Weak regulation unbounded goals
Merton -> Success goals blocked means
Success goals blocked means -> Five adaptations
Weak regulation unbounded goals -> Anomic suicide

Conclusion

Durkheim's anomie is deregulation of goals. Merton's is strain between universal success goals and unequal means. Use **Durkheim** for shocks that lift the ceiling; use Merton for a stable culture of success inside a closed opportunity structure.

Facts & figures

Division of Labour

Durkheim's anomic division of labour as pathological differentiation.

Suicide

Anomic type linked to economic and marital deregulation.

Merton 1938

Social Structure and Anomie: five modes of adaptation.

Innovation

Merton's term for accepting goals while using illegitimate means.