

You said:

what is emile durkheim best know for?

ChatGPT said:

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) is best known as one of the founders of modern sociology and for establishing sociology as an academic discipline distinct from philosophy and psychology. His major contributions include:

1. Theory of Social Facts

Durkheim argued that society is held together by social facts—patterns of behavior, norms, and values that exist outside the individual but exert control over them. He insisted that these should be studied scientifically, like “things.”

2. Division of Labor and Solidarity

In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), he explained how societies maintain cohesion:

Mechanical solidarity (traditional societies) – based on similarity and shared beliefs.

Organic solidarity (modern societies) – based on interdependence from specialized roles.

3. Study of Suicide

In *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim showed how even deeply personal acts can be explained by social causes (e.g., integration and regulation). He identified types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic, fatalistic—linking them to levels of social integration.

4. Religion and Collective Consciousness

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), he studied religion as a social institution. He argued that religious symbols and rituals represent the collective conscience of society, reinforcing unity.

5. Education and Morality

Durkheim also emphasized the role of education in transmitting social values and sustaining moral order.

In short: Durkheim is best known for demonstrating that society shapes individual behavior, for introducing systematic methods to study social phenomena, and for foundational works on social facts, solidarity, suicide, and religion.

Would you like me to give you a short 3–4 sentence version you could use as a quick summary, say for a class or a presentation?

You said:

Which aspects of Durkheim did Talcott Parsons emphasize

ChatGPT said:

Talcott Parsons emphasized Émile Durkheim primarily as a theorist of normative order, social integration, and moral regulation, selectively reading Durkheim in ways that supported Parsons's own project of structural functionalism.

Here are the main aspects Parsons highlighted:

1. Social Order and Norms

Parsons stressed Durkheim's idea that shared norms and values are the foundation of social order. He treated Durkheim as showing that societies hold together not mainly through coercion or self-interest, but through internalized moral rules.

Durkheim → collective conscience

Parsons → normative integration

2. Action Governed by Values (Not Just Interests)

Parsons emphasized Durkheim's rejection of utilitarianism. Social action, for both thinkers, is normatively regulated, not simply the result of rational calculation. This became central to Parsons's voluntaristic theory of action, where actors choose within value-structured systems.

3. Social Facts as Moral Constraints

Parsons read Durkheim's social facts less as external coercions and more as internalized moral obligations. What mattered to Parsons was not constraint against the actor, but regulation through shared values.

4. Integration as the Core Social Problem

Parsons foregrounded Durkheim's concern with integration—how societies avoid breakdown and anomie. He treated Durkheim as primarily asking: How is social order possible? This fed directly into Parsons's AGIL schema, especially the I (Integration) function.

5. Religion as a Moral System

From *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Parsons emphasized religion as a symbolic system that stabilizes values, rather than as ritual, emotion, or power. Religion became, in Parsons's hands, a prototype of value-integration across social systems.

Parsons tended to soften or neglect:

Durkheim's attention to conflict and coercion

The emotional, ritual, and ecstatic dimensions of religion

Durkheim's methodological radicalism ("treat social facts as things")

The historical instability implied by anomie

In One Sentence

Parsons emphasized Durkheim as a theorist of normative integration and moral order, transforming him into a cornerstone of consensus-oriented functionalism, while muting Durkheim's sharper edges around power, conflict, and crisis.

If you'd like, I can also sketch how later anthropologists and sociologists (e.g., ritual theorists or ethnomethodologists) pushed back against the Parsons-Durkheim reading.

You said:

What are the main aspects of Garfinkel's critique of Parsons' take on Durkheim

ChatGPT said:

Harold Garfinkel's engagement with Talcott Parsons and Émile Durkheim unfolds in two moves:

- (1) a sustained critique of Parsons's Durkheim, and
- (2) the construction of a radically different, ethnomethodological Durkheim.

Below are the main points, as Garfinkel himself and later commentators consistently frame them.

I. Garfinkel's critique of Parsons's reading of Durkheim

1. Norms are treated as external rules rather than members' accomplishments
Parsons reads Durkheimian norms as pre-existing value standards that actors internalize and then follow. Garfinkel argues this turns norms into explanatory abstractions that float above practice.
For Garfinkel, norms are not causes of action. They are products of action, continuously produced and recognized in situ.
2. Parsons substitutes analytic order for lived order
Parsons's systems theory explains order by invoking:
 - shared values
 - normative integration
 - systemic requirements

Garfinkel's critique: this confuses the sociologist's analytic reconstruction with the order that participants themselves must produce moment by moment. Parsons explains order after the fact; Garfinkel asks how order is done.

3. The "cultural dope" problem
Garfinkel famously charged that Parsonian actors are treated as "cultural dopes":
 - passively following norms,
 - mechanically guided by internalized values.

Against this, Garfinkel insists that actors are skilled, methodical, reflexive practitioners who actively interpret, negotiate, and repair social situations.

4. Normative explanations ignore accountability practices
Parsons emphasizes conformity to norms; Garfinkel shifts attention to accountability:
 - how actions are made observable, reportable, and intelligible to others
 - how participants demonstrate that what they are doing "counts as" normal,

reasonable, or moral

Parsons explains why order should exist; Garfinkel investigates how people show order to one another.

II. Garfinkel's new interpretation of Durkheim

Garfinkel does not reject Durkheim. He claims to recover a more radical Durkheim than Parsons allowed.

1. Durkheim's "objective reality of social facts" reinterpreted

Where Parsons treats social facts as macro-level constraints, Garfinkel re-reads Durkheim's dictum ("treat social facts as things") as a methodological instruction

Social facts are observable accomplishments, not hidden structures.

They are "objective" because:

members treat them as objective,

they are publicly accountable and inspectable.

2. Moral order as a practical achievement

Garfinkel argues that Durkheim's moral order is not a value system hovering above action, but something produced in ordinary practices:

queueing

conversation turn-taking

classroom instruction

legal procedures

Morality resides in how people make actions recognizably right, wrong, appropriate, or out of place.

3. Ethnomethods as the foundation of social order

Garfinkel's key move is to replace Parsonian norms with ethnomethods:

the practical methods members use to make sense of situations

background expectancies that are used, not obeyed

This becomes the core of ethnomethodology.

4. Breaching experiments as Durkheimian demonstrations

Garfinkel's breaching experiments are explicitly Durkheimian:

they reveal the taken-for-granted moral order

they show how violations provoke repair, sanction, and explanation

Order appears not as stability but as repair work.

5. From values to reflexivity

Parsons's Durkheim → values integrate action

Garfinkel's Durkheim → reflexivity sustains action

Reflexivity here means: actions are designed to be recognizable as what they are descriptions of action are themselves part of the action

III. The fundamental divergence (in one contrast)

Parsons	Garfinkel
Norms explain action	Action produces norms
Values are internalized	Accountability is displayed
Order is systemic	Order is local and practical
Actor is norm-following	Actor is methodically competent
Durkheim = moral consensus	Durkheim = practical moral work

Bottom line

Garfinkel's critique is not that Parsons misunderstood Durkheim entirely, but that he domesticated him.

Garfinkel's Durkheim:

is not a theorist of value systems,
but a theorist of how moral order is accomplished in practice.

This reinterpretation profoundly reshaped sociology, influencing conversation analysis, studies of work, education (including McDermott & Varenne), and the micro-foundations of social order.

If you'd like, I can:

trace this argument directly through Studies in Ethnomethodology
show how Garfinkel reads Suicide differently from Parsons
connect this to McDermott's classroom analyses as Durkheimian ethnomethodology