

Ever since Durkheim postulated the idea of anomic suicide several generations of sociologists have sought to determine the inter-relationships among social-structural variables, personality attributes, alienation and anomie. During the past two decades numerous empirical and theoretical analyses have appeared which, in terms of their general frame of reference, could be classified into three broad categories: sociological, psychological and social psychological.

To Durkheim suicide was a social fact and a sociological phenomenon which could be explained only in terms of the structure and functioning of social systems. Since each society has a collective aptitude for self-annihilation, the productive causes of suicide must be sought "directly" in the social concomitants of the society and not in the personal motives and ideas of individuals who make up the collectivity. Durkheim identified the three structural variables facilitating suicide as absence of integration of individual into his social group, over-integration and deregulation in society. He conceived anomie as a state of rulelessness resulting from society's inability to regulate individual's needs and their satisfaction, or, in other words, the "weakening of the moral constitution." Serious economic crises, sudden prosperity and abrupt technological changes lead to some sort of declassification and life is temporarily thrown out of gear. Individuals face an entirely new situation to which society cannot adjust them instantaneously. The result is a state of rulelessness which is the essence of anomie in the Durkheimian tradition. "The state of rulelessness or anomie is fur-

their heightened by the fact that human desires are less disciplined at the very moment when they would need a stronger discipline" (Durkheim, 1951:456). Having realized that the individual has no built-in structure to control his unlimited propensities, Durkheim (1951:452) argued that "only society... is in a position to play this restraining role; for it is the only moral power which is superior to the individual and which he acknowledges as superior."

Some recent developments in the discipline confirm as well as elaborate the Durkheimian proposition. Parsons (1949: 377), for instance, regards anomie as the antithesis of full institutionalization, the "state of disorganization where the hold of norms over individual conduct has broken down." Stressing, unlike Durkheim, that the deregulation of goals is not the only condition of anomie, Merton (1968) focuses on the deregulation of means. To Merton, anomie is a result of the disjunction between cultural goals and institutionally available means for the attainment of these goals. And Cloward (1959) adds a third variable namely differentials in the availability of illegitimate means which are not readily available to any but differentially distributed depending on the location of persons in the social structure. According to him, treatment of anomie must take into account the relationship between class structure and the accessibility to illegitimate means.

Now let us turn to some psychological considerations. Leo Srole's (1956) definition of anomie as "self-to-others alienation" reduces it to an individual phenomenon explicable in terms of interpersonal aliena-

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tion rather than alienation from norms. Laswell (1952) treats anomie as the "lack of identification on the part of the primary ego of the individual with a 'self that includes others. In a word, modern man appeared to be suffering from psychic isolation. He felt alone, cut off, unwanted, unloved, unvalued." While Riesman equates anomie with "maladjusted", Maclver (1950: 84-92) defines it as "the state of mind of one who has been pulled up by his moral roots, who has no longer any sense of continuity, of folk, of obligation." And psychoanalytic psychiatrists (See Durkheim, 1951: 23) argue that every individual possesses a certain degree of self-annihilatory drive "established in infancy and early childhood by the fears, anxieties, frustrations, loves and hatreds engendered in the individual by the family environment in terms of eliminatory processes, weaning, sex education, sibling rivalry, rejection or over-acceptance by parents, degree of dependence."

However, these two approaches — sociological and psychological — although dilate upon the Durkheimian theme of anomie and/or anomie suicide, do not answer one fundamental question: Why only some people in a society commit suicide?

There have been several attempts to resolve this ambiguity in the Durkheimian conception of anomie. Halbwachs (See Parsons, 1949:326), for instance, showed that there is no antithesis such as Durkheim expounded between sociological and psychopathological explanations of suicide but that they are complementary. Henry and Short studied '*Suicide and Homicide*' making systematic use of psychodynamic theory in combination with Durkheim's theory, and treated suicide as an act of aggression following from restraint and consequent frustration.

As Parsons (1949:326) points out Durkheim's criticism of psychopathological explanation of suicide related only to the

productive causes attributed to specific, hereditary psychopathological conditions. "His arguments do not, however, apply to the "environmental" and "functional" types of mental disturbance of which our understanding has been so greatly increased in the last generation, especially through psychoanalysis and related movements." Even what Durkheim called morphological types of suicide cannot be treated adequately in terms of their immediate causes but by the systematic reconstruction of the life-histories of these suicides. Arguing that in the light of recent findings of 'psychologic science' sociological analysis must be brought into harmony with psychoanalysis, Simpson (Durkheim, 1951:25-26) adds: "Neuroses, and suicide seems to present profound neurotic elements even when committed by a so-called normal person, must be treated medically as an individual phenomenon, but their causes may lie deep in the *social* life-history of the individual." According to him therefore, "The basic problem for social research must be to inter-relate the life-histories of individual suicides with sociological variables, on the hypothesis that certain social environments may (a) induce or (b) perpetuate or (c) aggravate the suicide-potential. If we can correlate for masses of data, suicides or attempted suicides with their having been induced, perpetuated, or aggravated by certain social environments, then we are in a position to establish laws of *generalized occurrence*." In short, Simpson is pleading for a synthesis of sociological and psychological analysis as an approach to suicide.

Similarly Inkeles (1965:255) argues that adequate sociological analysis of many social problems is impossible without the explicit use of psychological theory and data. He deplores what he calls the sociological S-R (state-rate) theory and its analogue in the psychological S-R (stimulus-response) theory, for their "failure to utilize

an explicit theory of the human personality." Inkeles (1965:255) suggests the formula (S) (P)-(R) which alone, he contends, could "explain why the absence of social integration should in some cases produce, not Durkheim's egoistic suicide, but mental illness, or homicide or nothing."

Recent empirical studies (of Killian and Grigg, 1962; McDill and Ridley, 1962) have exposed numerous factors — problems of minorities, social disintegration, political alienation, ethnic prejudice, self-estrangement and level of aspirations — that contribute to anomie. Hence the social psychological explanation posits that the phenomenon of anomie is inextricably intertwined with social degeneration and individual maladjustment or as Elwin Powell (1958: 131) put: "Anomie is both a social condition and psychic state."

Once again, while these empirical investigations and conceptual analysis have thrown more light on the circumstances leading to anomie and suicide, they do not solve the fundamental dilemma which has two distinct faces:

(a) Durkheimian sociological dilemma.

If suicide is determined by the degree of structural integration or institutionalization in a social system why does it *not* affect every member of the social system uniformly? If economic crises and abrupt technological changes disturb the societal scale and create a state of deregulation and declassification causing people to kill themselves, why is it that only a few individuals in any social system, despite the intensity of such crises, commit suicide? To take an extreme example, neither the Unitarians nor even atheists and several 'free-floating' intellectuals murder themselves on a mass scale.

(b) Psychoanalysis' psychological dilemma. If suicide is the culmination of self-annihilatory drives built into the personality of a child during the early socialization process, do all individuals with the predominance of these drives end up in self-murder? Even if they do, it still cannot explain why the Rajput women of India used to throw themselves into their husbands' funeral pyre and killed themselves. Or, if suicide is simply a form of 'displacement' whereby the suicide kills the introjected object, why should there be such wide variation in suicide rates in terms of the integration of a domestic society or a religious society?

Now the question arises: Is there an intervening mechanism between the individual and his social system that influences the responses of an individual in a given situation? Or, in more specific terms:

- (a) Is there an intervening structural variable that blunts or controls the suicide-potential inherent in the individual?
- (b) Is there an intervening personality variable that offsets or regulates the impact of normlessness or lack of integration in the society on a given individual?

The social psychological explanations detailed earlier take cognizance of these questions but seem to be content with the oft-repeated answer that sociological theory and data must be used in conjunction with psychological theory and data or that structural as well as personality variables must be looked into. But they do not delve into the dynamics either of the personality or of the social system in an attempt to relate

the intervening variables. Therefore, we must look for alternative explanations.

Since there can never be a one-to-one correspondence between personality and social structure, it is highly unlikely that all that goes on in a given society will affect every individual in it. The social consequences of normlessness — or lack of integration, for that matter — are not evenly distributed over the whole society or among the various components thereof. Moreover, individuals in a mass society are particularly immune to the 'moral weakening of the constitution' or the breakdown of the normative structure. They have learnt to be most selective and least sensitive, more rational and less emotional, to ignore and forget rather than to absorb and react.

Simmel's (1969) analysis of metropolis and mental life seems to provide a remote clue. For the sake of self-preservation modern man tends to develop a defensive reserve around his personality which protects him from the overwhelming social forces that threaten to engulf him. "The metropolitan type of man — which, of course, exists in a thousand individual variants — develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart. In this an increased awareness assumes the psychic prerogative" (Simmel, 1969:48). Individuals living in today's mass society acquire what Simmel calls the 'blase attitude' which involves antipathy, repulsion, unmerciful matter-of-factness and utmost particularization. This attitude precludes them from interacting with other men as full, emotional and concerned human beings. And precisely because in their everyday life men interact with one another in the most rational, matter-of-fact and impersonal way their psychic system is largely unaffected by the disruptive consequences of structural

disintegration and/or deinstitutionalization.

A somewhat parallel exposition of individual's structured indifference may be found in Durkheim's analysis of organically solidary society in which crime is no longer an offence against the collective consciousness of the community but simply a violation of personal rights. In other words, crime ceases to be a negation of the moral spirit of the collectivity; rather, it is just a violation of a given statute. Individuals in a mass society get so much used to crime, violence, and "corruption" that they fail to respond to them emotionally but tend to dismiss them as the "price for progress", "common ailments", or "structural inconsistencies" which will be taken care of in the ordinary process of law and life. This failure of the modern mass man to respond emotionally to the world around him may be termed as emotional vacuum. One of the latent functions of the modern mass media is the consistent reinforcement of this' emotional vacuum. News and portraits of ever so many victims of flood, hurricane, war and earthquakes as well as stories of crime and violence are thrust on us everyday that we are constrained to build kinds of defensive mechanisms around our psychic system so that these tales of woes and social problems do not unduly upset the scale of our emotions. This emotional vacuum in the urban man is so great that he can transform the metropolitan concentration into a lonely crowd and he can vanish the most acute social problem in the immediate environment into the thin air of epistemological non-entity.

Moreover, the emotional vacuum blase attitude or the reciprocal reserve is not simply a protective shell that guards the psychic system against the external dangers from the social system. Rather, it serves as a mechanism of two-way defense for the individual. Just as it helps the modern man to preserve the autonomy and individuality

of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, it also prevents any emotional imbalances and alienated spirits internal to the personality system from seeking overt expression through manifest activities. Thus there is a circular line of defence surrounding the personality system of the individual which, on the one hand, keeps within bounds the psychoanalysts' self-annihilatory drives or Lasswell's 'lack of identification' or 'psychic isolation' and, which, on the other hand, resists the flood of sweeping social consequences resulting from Durkheim's normlessness or Merton's acute disjunction between cultural goals and institutionalized means. Thus, what we have herein called the emotional vacuum or what Simmel calls the blase attitude or the reciprocal reserve is, indeed, a mediating mechanism between the Durkheimian normlessness and the psychoanalytic suicide-potential.

However, the protective shell is under the recurrent attack from the internal forces of psychic isolation and the external forces of social disintegration and might break down at some point in time. The forces of social disintegration hit the individual hard or his feelings of self-estrangement and alienation are further aggravated by his perception of normlessness in society. As if the walls of a big reservoir were to crack all on a sudden, the protective fortress around the personality structure of the individual gives way and the individual is carried away by the onrush of social disruption. And the individual is uprooted when there is an acute conjunction between psychic isolation and social deregulation, or more specifically, suicide occurs at a point where anomie meets alienation. In this perspective, then, Durkheim's anomie suicide results from a confluence of the external forces of social deregulation and the internal forces of psychic isolation.

A note of explanation is due here. The internal forces of psychic isolation include,

for the purpose of this paper, the suicide-potential or self-annihilatory drives inherent in every individual (the psychoanalytic explanation) as well as the several variants of alienation like self-estrangement and meaninglessness. Even if these forces are particularly strong in a given individual, he may not end his life if he is fully integrated into a primary group of his own choice. To the extent the individual identifies himself with the social group, it serves as a shock absorber and nullifies the self-destructive tendencies in the individual. Thus the psychoanalysis' suicide-potential built into the individual in early childhood is later on substantially modified by social factors such as group identification and cultural integration and the consequent sense of belonging in the individual and his perception of being able to satisfy the various needs and aspirations through the primary group.

The external forces of social disruption include Durkheim's lack of integration, over-integration and normlessness. If suicide could be explained in terms of these social concomitants as Durkheim posited, they certainly do not explain why these destructive forces uproot only certain members of society and not others. Let us examine another aspect of the ambiguity in the Durkheimian tradition. Referring to specific instances of altruistic suicide Durkheim (1951:219) writes: "When a person kills himself, in all these cases, it is not because he assumes the right to do so but, on the contrary, because it is his duty. If he fails in this obligation, he is dishonored and also punished, usually, by religious sanctions... if such a person insists on living he loses public respect; in one case the usual funeral honors are denied, in another a life of horror is supposed to await him beyond the grave. The weight of society is thus brought to bear on him to lead him to destroy himself." This means

Durkheim (1951:223) clearly recognized the presence of an element of coercion in altruistic suicide and even while distinguishing between obligatory and optional altruistic suicides, he is explicit that the distinction is only a matter of degree and the "word (optional) simply means that they (optional altruistic suicides) are less expressly required by society than when strictly obligatory. Indeed, the two varieties are so closely related that it is impossible to distinguish where one begins and the other ends." If, thus, altruistic suicide is society's death sentence for the individual and if "it compels and is the author of conditions and circumstances making this obligation coercive," (Durkheim, 1951:220) then one might question whether an obligatory death sentence could be treated on the same conceptual level as egoistic and anomie suicides which are purely voluntary. Whereas in egoistic suicide individual violates the mandate of society which forbids death, from altruistic suicide individual has no honourable escape. This compulsive component built into the concept of altruism lends support to our theory in a way that Durkheim did not anticipate.

Altruistic suicide is not necessarily a simple function of over-integration. Rather, over-integration leads to suicide because it facilitates the intermingling of over-whelming social forces surrounding the community's mores and psychological forces of alienation. The Rajput women in India on the death of their husbands and in Gaul the followers and servants on the death of their chief suffer intense psychic isolation and life itself becomes devoid of any meaning and precisely at a time when the psychic forces of alienation are most intense in the individuals, society rejects them as outcasts and leaves no alternatives for self-preservation but forces them to dispose themselves of. In other words, the social group rejects or alienates the individual at

the very moment when he most needs its support and strength.

The social forces resulting from lack of integration and normlessness also affect the individual in almost the same manner. When the internal forces of psychic isolation mingle with the socially generated forces of group alienation resulting from lack of integration or with society's failure to restrain the individual, that is normlessness, alternatives for self-preservation are denied for the individual and suicide ensues.

This formula alone can resolve the ambiguity inherent in the Durkheimian tradition. Now we can identify the factors—structural concomitants as well as psychological attributes—that induce, inhibit, facilitate, or aggravate the suicide-potential inherent in the individual and the collective aptitude for suicide that Durkheim attributed to certain social groups. They are:

- (a) Individual's state of mind i.e. the psychic predispositions of the social actor.
- (b) The state of society or the structural situation of the social system.
- (c) The strength of the protective shell surrounding the individual's personality.
- (d) Individual's own perception of the social situation. The theory may now be summarized in terms of the following propositions:
 1. Alienation is an individual phenomenon of psychic isolation.
 2. Anomie is a social phenomenon of deinstitutionalization which includes normlessness as well as lack of social integration.
 3. Suicide occurs when there is a conjunction between individual alienation and social anomie.
 4. The intensity of suicide-potential varies

- directly with the individual's perception of normlessness in society.
5. The emotional vacuum is a function of mass society.
 6. The strength of the protective shell deteriorates with the consistent attack of internal (meaninglessness, self-estrangement or alienation) and external disruptive consequences or social deregulation) forces pressing on it all the time.
 7. The breakdown of the reciprocal reserve is a necessary but not sufficient precondition for the self-annihilation of the individual.
 8. When the blase attitude fails him and when the reserve breaks down, the individual seeks to identify more closely with his social group—a primary group. But when he perceives that such identification with or integration into the social system is impossible because of deregulation or normlessness, then the individual sees no alternatives for self-preservation, and is inclined to end his own life.
 9. The individual may be mentally or socially uprooted as either of the two forces — psychic forces of alienation or social forces anomie — supersede the other.
 10. The intensity of the two forces varies independently as their roots are in two different systems — one in the personality system of the individual and the other in the social system of his society or group.
 11. The simple supersession of either of the forces by the other is not a sufficient — although necessary — condition for the physical destruction of the individual. For example, the disruptive social forces may not, be themselves, be able to shake off a strong personality from its solid foundation. Similarly, forces of alienation and the cumulative influences of built-up frustration may not destroy an individual who is rooted in and solemnly committed to a primary group.
 12. The individual is engulfed only by a confluence of destructive social and psychic forces which eliminate all alternatives for self-preservation.

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