

Comparison of sociological approaches of Emile Durkheim and Phil Zuckerman

Sociology is a discipline that studies the behaviour of people within the social structure. Many important thinkers have theories and ideas in this field. Religion is a frequently discussed topic in sociological studies, and many sociologists have studied the effects of religion on society. In this article, the theories of Emile Durkheim, one of the important names in the sociology of religion, and the views of Phil Zuckerman will be compared.

Emile Durkheim is a sociologist who lived in France in the late 19th century. He is known for his work in the sociology of religion. According to Durkheim, religion is a key factor that ensures social unity. This function of religion contributes to the harmonious functioning of society by enabling people to share common values, beliefs, and behaviours. Therefore, Durkheim defends the view that religion functions as a means of supporting social unity.

Durkheim also mentions four main elements that determine the social functions of religion. These; collective consciousness, rituals, symbolism, and social cooperation. Collective consciousness is a concept that refers to people's shared beliefs, values, and behaviours. Religion strengthens social unity by raising this collective consciousness. Rituals and symbolism contribute to religion creating a common language in society. Social cooperation, on the other hand, allows religion to bring people together in solidarity and cooperation.

In this context, Durkheim's theory of sociology of religion is based on the views that religion functions as a tool that preserves social unity and raises people's collective consciousness. In this article, Durkheim's theories will be compared with those of Phil Zuckerman and the similarities and differences between different approaches to the sociology of religion will be examined.

I. Emile Durkheim's Sociology of Religion Theory

Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology, considered religion as a fundamental aspect of human society. According to Durkheim, religion is not only an individual matter, but it also plays a significant role in the functioning of society.

He believed that religion has the power to create social cohesion and bring people together by providing a shared set of beliefs and values. In other words, religion is a social institution that serves as a unifying force for society.

Durkheim argued that religion performs important social functions, such as providing meaning and purpose to life, creating a sense of belonging and identity, and promoting social order and stability. Through its rituals and symbols, religion reinforces the moral codes and norms of society, and strengthens the social bonds between individuals. Additionally, Durkheim believed that religion elevates the collective consciousness of society by providing a transcendent source of meaning and purpose beyond the material world.

II. Phil Zuckerman's Sociological Theory of Religion

Phil Zuckerman, a contemporary sociologist, offers a distinct perspective on the role of religion in society. Rather than viewing religion as a cohesive force, Zuckerman argues that it can lead to individual oppression and societal division. Through his sociological theory of religion, Zuckerman explores the negative effects of religion on personal freedoms and social harmony.

Zuckerman argues that religion can lead to the oppression of individuals by promoting conformity and discouraging critical thinking. In his book "Society Without God," Zuckerman presents case studies of countries with high levels of secularism, where individuals experience greater personal autonomy and freedom of expression. In contrast, he argues that countries with high levels of religiosity tend to have more oppressive societies, where individuals are expected to conform to traditional values and norms.

Zuckerman also contends that religion can contribute to social division by promoting exclusive identities and beliefs. In his article "Atheism, Secularity, and Well-Being: How the Findings of Social Science Counter Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions," Zuckerman notes that religious groups often view themselves as superior to others and promote the exclusion of those who do not share their beliefs. This can lead to social fragmentation and conflicts between different religious groups.

Finally, Zuckerman asserts that religion can limit personal freedoms, particularly those related to sexuality and gender. He argues that religious beliefs can lead to the imposition of

restrictive moral codes, which can limit the ability of individuals to express themselves and live fulfilling lives. Zuckerman notes that countries with higher levels of secularism tend to have more progressive views on issues related to sexuality and gender, as they are not constrained by religious moral codes.

III. Comparison of the sociology of religion theories of Emile Durkheim and Phil Zuckerman

A. Similarities

Emile Durkheim and Phil Zuckerman, despite belonging to different historical and cultural contexts, share some similarities in their views regarding the social impact of religion. Both sociologists emphasize the role of religion in shaping social structures and institutions, as well as its function in fostering social cohesion and collective consciousness.

Firstly, both Durkheim and Zuckerman focus on the social influence of religion. Durkheim argues that religion is a fundamental aspect of social life, and its practices and beliefs provide individuals with a shared sense of identity and purpose, which leads to the creation of stable social structures. Similarly, Zuckerman acknowledges that religion has a significant impact on individuals' attitudes and behaviours, affecting their perceptions of the world and shaping their moral values and ethical standards.

Secondly, Durkheim and Zuckerman agree that religion plays an important role in promoting social cohesion and collective consciousness. Durkheim posits that religious rituals and symbols are powerful tools for unifying individuals and reinforcing social norms and values. Similarly, Zuckerman recognizes that religious communities can foster a sense of belonging and solidarity, enabling individuals to find support and comfort in times of need.

Durkheim and Zuckerman's similar views on the social impact of religion suggest that despite being separated by time and culture, they share a common understanding of the function of religion in shaping social structures and institutions, and its role in fostering social cohesion and collective consciousness.

B. Differences

Emile Durkheim and Phil Zuckerman have different perspectives on the role of religion in society, particularly in relation to social unity and individual freedom. Durkheim believed that religion played a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and collective consciousness, which was essential for the functioning of society. In contrast, Zuckerman argued that religion can have negative effects on individuals, suppressing their individuality and limiting their freedom.

Additionally, Durkheim saw religion as having a positive impact on social structure, with religious rituals and beliefs promoting solidarity and shared values among members of society. Conversely, Zuckerman viewed religion as a source of division and conflict, with religious differences leading to discrimination and intolerance.

While both Durkheim and Zuckerman recognized the importance of religion in society, they had contrasting views on its functions and effects. Durkheim emphasized the positive role of religion in promoting social unity, while Zuckerman focused on its negative effects on individual freedom and the potential for religious conflict.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the sociological theories of religion proposed by Emile Durkheim and Phil Zuckerman have contributed significantly to the understanding of the role of religion in society. Both Durkheim and Zuckerman emphasize the social impact of religion, with Durkheim emphasizing its role in promoting social solidarity and collective consciousness, while Zuckerman focuses on the ways in which religion can be oppressive and limiting to individual freedoms. While their perspectives on the functions of religion differ, both sociologists offer valuable insights into the complexities of the relationship between religion and society. The study of religion continues to be a significant field of inquiry in sociology, and the works of Durkheim and Zuckerman remain relevant and influential in contemporary research. By critically evaluating these theories, scholars can gain a better understanding of

the diverse ways in which religion affects social change and contributes to the formation of individual and collective identities.