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Durkheim and Freud on Prohibitions and Taboos: Their Complementariness for the Explanation of Primitive Religious Thought

Wardatul Akmam*

*Anthropological researches on primitive tribes of Australia provide the groundwork for two complementary works on the nature of the origin of religious thought, namely, Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. These two studies are contrasting yet interestingly comparable analyses of primitive life. What Durkheim regards as the simplest form of social organisation, Freud considers "backward and wretched" but both endeavour to understand the social order and tribal norms established around beliefs in prohibition and taboos. The result is two very different perspectives--Freud's psychoanalytical and Durkheim's sociological that when taken together, provide a comprehensive and complementary explanation for the origins of religious thought. This article, after discussing Durkheim's and Freud's ideas and beliefs on prohibitions and taboos, finds that in spite of having different viewpoints of study and methodology, taken together offer us a broader understanding of prohibitions and taboos.*

Introduction

Anthropological researches on primitive tribes of Australia provide the groundwork for two complementary works on the nature of the origin of religious thought, Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995)¹ [herein after E.F.] and Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1918) [herein after T.T.], are contrasting yet interestingly comparable analyses of primitive life. What Durkheim regards as the simplest form of social organisation, Freud considers "backward and wretched" (T.T.:4), but both endeavour to understand the social order and tribal norms established around beliefs in prohibition and taboos. The result is two very different perspectives--Freud's psychoanalytical and Durkheim's sociological - that when taken together provide a comprehensive and complementary explanation for the origins of religious thought. For the purposes of simplification, this article is limited to a comparison between

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¹ The original book written by Emile Durkheim was published for the first time in 1912.

Durkheim's and Freud's discussions on prohibitions and taboos. These aspects of their works are used to demonstrate the contrasts and similarities as well as to exemplify the complementariness of their different approaches.

The similarities between the two books lie primarily in their discussion of the prohibitions/taboo related to totemism. Both authors have selected mainly the Australian aboriginal tribes as their base for understanding the prohibitions, although Freud makes reference to tribes from other parts of the world as well. Freud and Durkheim use almost the same sources in their discussion – Frazer's *The Golden Bough and Totemism and Exogamy*, Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites*, McLennan's "The Worship of Animals and Plants", Spencer and Gillen's *Northern Tribes*, etc. to prove their assumptions. Both the writers touched on the principal prohibitions related to totemism: not to kill the totem and to avoid sexual contact within the same totem clan, how violations of these taboos are punished, contagiousness of the taboos, taboos related to death and mourning, taboos related to magic, etc.

Main General Goals and Assumptions

Before we go to the discussion on Durkheim's and Freud's understandings on prohibitions/taboo, it is necessary to understand the background and basic assumptions of their books. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995), Durkheim attempts to discover the principles of the most primitive and simplest religion and give an explanation thereof based on the sociological perspective. In doing so, he tries to prove the assumptions that "religion is an eminently social thing" (E.F.: 9) and that "the idea of society is the soul of religion" (E.F.: 421). According to Durkheim, the common feature of all known religions is the division of everything existing in this world into the sacred and the profane (E.F.: 34). He does not explicitly define the sacred and the profane but asserts that "[s]acred things are things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are those things to which the prohibitions are applied and that must keep at a distance from what is sacred" (E.F.:38). Anything, goods, spirits, a rock, a pebble, a spring, a tree, a house, a piece of wood, certain words, phrases or formulas, can be attributed the position of a sacred thing.

According to Durkheim, each religion has its beliefs and rites – which are essential for their existence and functioning. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he defines rites as "rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things" (E.F.: 38). In 'Book II', Durkheim discusses the "Principal Mode of Ritual Conduct" and distinguishes between the negative and positive cult. The

“negative cult” is a complex system of rites that maintain the separation between the sacred and the profane. “These rites prevent unsanctioned mixture and contact and prevent either domain from encroaching on the other” (E.F.: 303). Hence, these rites prescribe abstinence and “prohibit certain ways of acting” (p. 304). These prohibitions discussed by Durkheim are with which we are concerned in this article.

In *Totem and Taboo* (1918), using a psychoanalytic perspective, Freud mainly searches for the origin of totemism and two main taboos related to totemism – not to kill the totem animal and avoid sexual relationship within the same totem clan. In the course of his discussion, he focuses on totemism, but deals with taboo far more extensively. Like Durkheim, he mainly uses secondary data found through fieldwork among Australian aboriginal tribes, whom he thinks represent the most primitive races. However, he uses data of other tribes to a greater extent than does Durkheim. In order to explain and prove his ideas regarding the origin of totemism and exogamy, he points out the resemblances between the psychic principles behind the observance of certain taboos and the mentality of the neurotics, which are embedded in the ambivalence of emotions.

The Concept of Taboo

Durkheim acknowledges that in common usage, prohibitions are known as “taboos.” Taboo is a Polynesian word denoting an institution on the basis of which certain things are kept from being used ordinarily. Since this concept is universal to all religions, Durkheim does not want to use a term, which is peculiar only to Polynesians. Therefore, he uses the term “prohibitions” in order to remain more general.

Freud also states that “taboo” is a Polynesian word but elaborates it a little more. According to him, the word taboo has a double meaning – on the one hand, it refers to the unclean, uncanny, forbidden, and the dangerous, on the other hand, it means sacred, or consecrated, “[T]aboo expresses itself essentially in prohibitions and restrictions” (T.T.:26). He further explains:

Taboo is a very primitive prohibition imposed from without (by an authority) and directed against the strongest desires of man. The desire to violate it continues in the unconscious; persons who obey the taboo have an ambivalent feeling toward what is affected by the taboo (T.T.:48).

For him, taboos are “the product of the psychic powers of man” (T.T.:35). Freud also states that “[t]aboo is a command of conscience,”

one who violates a taboo feels a "terrible sense of guilt" (T.T.:90) within himself. Freud defines conscience as "the inner perception of objections to definite wish impulses that exist in us" (T.T.:90), which according to him probably originated with the ambivalent feelings from definite human relations containing this ambivalence. In a situation of ambivalent feeling, one aspect of two contrasting feelings remains unconscious, it "is kept repressed by the compulsive domination of the other component" (p. 90). Simply put, there exists at the same time, within a person, a feeling of love and that of hate, toward someone or something, one of these feelings remains unconscious. According to Freud, all taboos, except those related to magic, have at their root, ambivalence of emotions. As we will see later, taboos related to magic, according to Freud, have their root in the omnipotence of thought.

Totemism

Both Durkheim and Freud consider totemism as an elementary form of social organisation, and discuss taboos related to totemism. According to Durkheim, totemism "is the religion of an anonymous and impersonal force that is identifiable: in certain men, certain animals and certain images (E.F.: 191). Usually, a plant or animal is referred to as a totem of a certain clan. The totem provides the clan with a name and an emblem, which all the members of the clans share. The totem of a clan symbolises "the totemic principle or god" (E.F.: 208) and also the clan itself at the same time. Freud considers totemism as an all-encompassing system containing within it all the social and religious institutions of the native Australians, who are divided into clans, each clan being named after its totem. He quotes Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy* to define a totem:

A totem is a class of material objects which a savage regards with superstitious respect, believing that there exists between him and every member of the class an intimate and altogether special relation. The connection between a person and his totem is mutually beneficent; the totem protects the man and the man shows respect for the totem by not killing it if it be an animal, and not cutting it if it be a plant (T.T.:134).

The totem's name becomes the name of each member of the clan and they believe that they are descendants of that totem. Here, we observe that their views regarding totemism are at the same time similar and complementary. While they discuss the same topic, their combined reading gives us a broader picture.

Religious and Nonreligious Taboos

For the purpose of his book, Durkheim concentrates mainly on religious prohibitions. He assigns great importance to religious prohibitions that separate all sacred things from all profane ones. Being derived directly from beliefs in sacredness, these prohibitions express and implement those beliefs in sacredness. Religious prohibitions furnish "the raw materials for a genuine cult" that is the basis of all other cults, and are considered by Durkheim as "religious prohibitions par excellence" (E.F.:306).

Freud, unlike Durkheim, distinguishes between taboo restrictions and religious prohibitions. According to him, taboos are not commands issued by god. In agreement with Wundt he considers taboo "the oldest unwritten code of law of humanity" (T.T.:27) and that they preceded religion. However, he states that "[t]he oldest and most important taboo prohibitions are the two basic laws of totemism: namely not to kill the totem animal, and to avoid sexual intercourse with totem companions of the opposite sex" (T.T.:44). A large portion of *Totem and Taboo* (1918) is devoted to the discussion of these two taboos. I will expand on Freud's ideas on these taboos a little later in this discussion.

Freud discusses various types of nonreligious taboos in addition to religious taboos and shows how each of those taboos except those related to magic (e.g. those related to enemies, the dead, chiefs and kings and those of exogamy) originate in the ambivalence of emotions (magical taboos, according to Freud, are more related to the "Omnipotence of Thought"). Durkheim's detailed discussion on religious taboos and Freud's discussion on nonreligious taboos mark a difference between them as well as make them complementary in our understanding of prohibitions and taboos. In the following, I would point out some of the religious prohibitions discussed by Durkheim and a few of the nonreligious taboos discussed by Freud.

Religious Prohibitions

According to Durkheim, there exist gradations among human beings on the basis of sacredness. Women and uninitiated men are regarded completely as profane, while old and initiated men are graded with a certain degree of sacredness. Foodstuffs are also graded with a certain degree of sacredness. As a result, there are certain foodstuffs that are considered profane and hence regarded as "women's food." Initiated men must not touch or eat this food. As the animal or the plant that serves as a totem to a clan is regarded as a sacred being, killing (or picking) and eating of these is strictly prohibited. Anyone violating this prohibition puts him/herself in grave danger – "the sacrilege is thought to bring

about death automatically" (E.F.:127). However, as old men are considered very sacred persons, they are allowed to eat the sacred totem animal or plant, which is strictly prohibited for general people. Initiated men also have differences among them with respect to sacredness. They gradually are allowed in the domain of the sacred after passing a series of ordeals through special ceremonies, which takes months and even years to reach the highest order. Men of lower grades are not allowed to touch the foodstuffs of higher grades. In sum, contends Durkheim, "all the religious prohibitions fall into two classes: the prohibitions between the sacred pure and sacred impure" (E.F.:306 fn.7).

Blood flowing during the initiation ceremony has a sacred virtue, and thus must not be approached by the profane. There are certain words and sounds that must not be uttered by or reach the ears of the profane. Therefore, women must not hear ritual songs on pain of death. The personal name of a sacred person cannot be pronounced during profane living. Each man has a secret name, in addition to a public name, which women and children must never know and must never be used in mundane living.

According to Durkheim, the emblem is more sacred than the totem to the members of the clan. Thus those objects that have the emblem of the clan imprinted on them are considered very sacred and have strict, numerous and rigorously imperative prohibitions. For this reason, *churingas*, *waningas* and *nurtungas*² that bear the emblem of the clan are never to be handled by uninitiated men or by women. They are only allowed on rare occasions to take a glimpse at these from a distance. Women are only permitted to hear the noise of the *churinga* from a respectful distance. "Churingas are kept in a sort of temple, at the threshold of which the din of profane life settles into silence; it is the domain of sacred things" (E.F.:133).

Rites of initiation are also considered very sacred. Women cannot even see the place where the ceremony takes place, or the novice or the totemic paintings that are done on celebrants' bodies, or carved on rocks, or on the ground. The special ornaments used in religious ceremonies cannot be taken away from the site of the ritual. The special paintings done on bodies must be washed away so that they are not carried into the profane world. Women are also not allowed to see the cult instruments – but may take a glimpse of them from a distance.

Nonreligious Taboos

Freud discusses quite a few nonreligious taboos. Here some of the taboos related to enemies and to chiefs and kings will be pointed out.

² Churingas, nurtunjas and waningas are sacred objects.

Among the savages, there exist certain taboos for the victors of a battle. For example, in Timor, the killer of an enemy, after coming back from a fight, cannot enter his house instantly. A separate hut is erected for him where he must observe certain rules of purification for two months. He cannot nourish himself [a second person puts "food in his mouth" (T.T.:53)], or see his wife. Freud mentions similar procedures of purification among other tribes and points out that there must be some feelings other than the hostile feelings toward the enemy, which are manifested in repentance. Thus Freud understands all these taboos related to the enemy as rules that have been deduced from the savages' feelings of ambivalence toward their enemies.

There are also taboos related to chiefs and kings. Often, the touch of a king might heal a commoner. However, it is taboo for a commoner to touch the king. Violation is sure to cause death. While kings are bestowed with great powers, a lot of taboos are imposed on them. Freud mentions the taboo ceremonial of the Mikado of Japan. In order to preserve his holiness, he could never touch the ground, but must be borne on men's shoulders. Neither could he see the sun. In ancient times, he was made to sit still on the throne as any of his movement might bring about disaster to his people. Freud mentions that these taboo ceremonials are the result of the ambivalence of emotions toward the ruler. People honour and love the ruler, but at the same time have envious and hostile feelings toward him. For this reason taboos are imposed on kings (and priests) to express veneration, as well as to guard them, punish them and take revenge for their elevation.

Taboos Related to Magic

In Chapter 3 of *Totem and Taboo* (1918), Freud discusses, to some extent, taboos related to magic. He quotes E.B. Tylor to define magic: "mistaking an ideal connection for a real one" (p.103). The principle that controls magic "is Omnipotence of Thought" (T.T.:111). The taboos related to magic also have the omnipotence of thought working behind it. When savage men go away for hunting, fishing, making war voyages or collecting valuable plants, numerous oppressive restrictions are imposed on the women who stay at home because of their belief that these restrictions will "exert a sympathetic effect upon the success of the far away expedition" (T.T.:127). This element is, according to Freud, "nothing but a thought of home, the longing of the absent, and that these disguises conceal the sound psychological insight that the men will do their best only if they are fully assured of the whereabouts of their guarded women" (T.T.:128).

Durkheim does not elaborate on magical prohibitions. He merely mentions them to distinguish them from religious prohibitions: "... religious prohibitions are categorical imperatives and magic ones are utilitarian maxims, the earliest form of hygienic and medical prohibitions" (E.F.: 305). The concept of sin and punishment through society (in the case of violation) is part and parcel of religious prohibitions. However, the concept of sin does not appear at all in the realm of magic. There is no punishment from society either. By violating a magical prohibition, "one takes risks like those a sick person takes by not following the advice of the doctor" (E.F.: 305). The main idea in a religious prohibition is to show respect and prevent disrespect toward the sacred through keeping the sacred apart from the profane. Magical prohibitions presuppose nothing more than "an entirely secular idea of property" (E.F.:305), which prohibits mixture of some things from others to prevent the dangers that the mixture might bring. Here again, we see that having combined Durkheim's and Freud's books, we have a broader understanding of magical prohibitions.

Taboos Related to Death and Mourning

Both Durkheim and Freud discuss taboos related to death and mourning. According to Durkheim, "[a] dead person is a sacred being because the soul that animated the body adheres to the corpse" (E.F.:307). That is why, sometimes the only way that a corpse's bones can be carried is by wrapping them "in a sheet of bark" (E.F.:307). There are also prohibitions against seeing the corpse for which the face is covered so as to make sure it cannot be seen. The place of the occurrence of death must also be avoided, not only by women, but by all as it is believed that the deceased's soul is still there. For this reason, the clan breaks up camp and destroys all it contains and relocates at a distance for a period of time.

During mourning, the name of the dead person cannot be uttered unless in absolutely necessary cases – even then, the name can only be whispered. This prohibition is often made permanent "for the widow and certain family members" (E.F.:310). Moreover, the close friends and relatives of the deceased cannot use certain words used by him/her. The female relatives of the dead person have to suspend their ordinary life occupations and not communicate with outsiders. For the period of mourning, the women kinsmen of the deceased are required to be in total silence, which might last up to a couple of years. As a result, it is common among the Warramunga to find a situation in which all the women of a certain camp might have to observe absolute silence.

Like Durkheim, Freud also discusses taboos related to the dead. Among the savages, even a close friend or relative becomes an enemy

after death. The dead person becomes taboo and also those who take part in his/her interment or touch the corpse of the dead person. Among the Maori, a person who takes part in the internment of a corpse is considered very unclean and is almost totally cut off from any kind of intercourse with his fellow group members for a certain period of time. He cannot touch food with his hands and must eat off the ground as much as he can with his lips and teeth, having hands tied behind his back. The belief rooted in the turning of dead relatives into enemies is that death can occur only through slaying, which makes the soul of the dead person irritable and vindictive. Moreover, the dead person envies the living and wishes to kill them to be reunited with kinsmen. Furthermore, according to Freud, there is always an ambivalent feeling (a feeling of love and hostility) toward persons (whom one overtly loves) in everybody's disposition. When a person dies, his soul knows about the hostile feelings of his closest kinsmen and turns into their enemies. Therefore, in order to satiate the soul of the dead, the living kinsmen go through a period of mourning, observing certain taboos to "protect" themselves. Thus, for taboos related to the dead, the ambivalence of emotions is the root. Hence, we see in the case of taboos related to death and mourning too that Durkheim and Freud taken together offer us a wider and more comprehensive picture.

Contagiousness of Taboo

Durkheim mentions the contagious power of the sacred, which is extended to the prohibitions as well. For example, the Nanja tree is a sacred being for the members of the clan that has that tree as their totem. "[E]very bird that comes to light upon that tree shares in the same quality; so to touch the bird is forbidden as well" (E.F.:322). Durkheim also gives the example of the neophyte:

The neophyte lives in an atmosphere full of religiousness, and he himself is as though suffused with it. As a result, everything he touches is forbidden to women and withdrawn from contact with them, down to the bird he has struck with his stick, the kangaroo he has run through with his spear, and the fish that has stuck his fishhook (E.F.:323).

Just as Durkheim discusses contagiousness of the sacred, which extends the range of prohibitions, Freud addresses the issue of contagiousness of taboo. He prefers to use the term "displacement" to refer to the same process. Displacement might take place either through touch, or through any other means of contact. He gives a vivid example from the Maori, which he quotes from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*:

... a Maori chief would not blow on a fire with his mouth; for his sacred breath would communicate its sanctity to the fire, which would pass it onto the meat in the pot, which would pass it on the man who ate the meat which was in the pot, which was breathed on by the chief, so that the eater, infected by the chief's breath conveyed through these intermediaries, would surely die (T.T.:39).

Therefore, we observe that Durkheim and Freud mention different prohibitions/taboo to express very similar ideas on the contagiousness of the taboos, which makes our understanding on the issue clearer.

Violation of Taboo

Both Durkheim and Freud discuss the consequences of violations of taboos, which are similar and complementary. According to Durkheim, violations of religious prohibitions are strictly dealt with by the clansmen. Violation of certain prohibitions is thought to produce death automatically. Beside this automatic sanction, either a punishment through a man's purposeful infliction, or at least public disapproval and blame are added. Even when death of the violator has already occurred as a result of the sin of violating the taboo, the violation is also denounced.

Freud also mentions that violation of a taboo related to the protection of the totem (e.g. eating the totem animal) is thought to be automatically punished by death or severe disease. However, the violation of a taboo related to sexual contact is not left to automatic punishment. The criminal "is hunted down and killed by his clansmen" (T.T.:8). A person who violates a taboo becomes taboo himself. This is because this act creates temptations in the minds of others to violate the taboo as well.

However, both Durkheim and Freud point out that the prohibitions related to totemism are sometimes intentionally violated. Durkheim mentions, for example, that the prohibitions against eating the totem animal are violated, (or superseded) when there is nothing other than the totem animal or plant to live on. Also, if the totem animal is a dangerous one, then the taboo against killing the totem animal can be violated. For ritual occasions, in collectivity also, parts of the totem animal or plant are eaten, an act which would never be performed by individuals on their own, because violation of his prohibition automatically leads to the death of the violator. According to Durkheim, above all, it is the collectivity or society, that is sacred, the all-powerful god. By individually obeying the prohibitions and breaking them in collectivity, individuals are actually rejoicing the collectivity. Thus, Durkheim extends the phenomenon of violation of prohibitions to explain the supremacy of the collectivity,

which Freud does not, through which he widens our perception on the issue.

Psychic Mechanisms Related to Taboo

Although Durkheim emphasises prohibitions as the medium of maintaining the sacredness of the sacred by keeping them apart from the profane, he also speaks about the psychic mechanisms through which individuals imagine religious forces. To explain how the sanctions function, Durkheim writes:

A profane being cannot violate a prohibition without having the religious force which he has improperly approached extend to him and take him over. But since there is antagonism between himself and that force, he finds himself subject to a hostile power, the hostility of which is inevitably manifested in violent reactions that tend to destroy him. This is why sickness and death are presumed to be the natural consequences of all such transgressions, and such are the consequences that are presumed to occur by themselves with a sort of physical necessity. The culprit feels invaded by a force that takes him over and against which he is powerless. Has he eaten the totemic animal? He feels it pervading him and gnawing at his entrails, he lies on the ground and awaits death. Every profanation implies a consecration, but one that is dreadful to whoever is consecrated and whoever comes near him. Indeed, the results of that consecration in part sanction the prohibition. (E.F.:322-3).

Extending Durkheim's psychological aspect in prohibitions, in order to find the origin of taboos, Freud tries to establish resemblances between the psychological factors behind taboos and those behind compulsive neurosis. The neurotic develops a phobia of a certain object or act and creates a prohibition for himself, the violation of which, according to the patient, is going to cause great harm to someone in his environment.

Among many cases of neuroses, Freud refers to neurotic patient's phobias of certain animals. Through psychoanalysis, he shows that the phobia of an animal was actually a phobia of the father, displaced onto the animal. He shows how in the unconscious, "little John" a five-year-old boy feared his father and wished his death. This fear and wish against the father were displaced onto a horse – the boy feared that the horse would make its way into the room to bite him, which meant that he was fearing the punishment that would befall him for wishing that the horse should die. Freud's explanation for the fear of the father was plainly that "he [the boy] felt the father to be his rival for the favour of the mother, upon whom his budding sexual wishes were by dark premonition directed" (T.T.:167). Along with the feeling of rivalry toward the father,

little John also had a feeling of tenderness toward him. The boy relieved himself of this ambivalent feeling through displacing his anxious and hostile feelings upon the horse – a substitute for his father.

In generalising his theory of the displacement of the fear of the father onto the animal in the case of the neurotic, Freud explains the substitution of the totem animal for the father (for males) in totemism as well. Among primitive tribes the totem animal is considered their ancestor and their primal father.

In order to explain the origin of the two fundamental taboos in totemism, Freud used the conception of the “primal horde” put forward by Darwin. According to Darwin, man originally lived in small hordes (communities). In these hordes, sexual promiscuity was prevented by the “oldest and strongest male” (T.T.:162), who out of jealousy, defended his single or several wives from all other men. From this theory, Freud assumes that “a violent, jealous father ... keeps all the females for himself and drives away the growing sons (T.T.:182). One day, the expelled sons join together to slay and eat the father and hence end the father horde. By joining their forces together they accomplish something, which was impossible for them to do on their own. Now they could identify themselves with the father each having acquired a portion of his strength.

Freud further assumes that like the neurotic child, these sons also had tender feelings, love and admiration for him. After satisfying their hatred toward the father by killing him, the tender feelings that were suppressed asserted themselves.

What the father's presence had formerly prevented they themselves now prohibited in the psychic situation of “subsequent obedience”... . They undid their deed by declaring that killing of the father substitute, the totem, was not allowed, and renounced the fruits of their deed by denying themselves the liberated women. Thus they created the two fundamental taboos of totemism out of the *sense of guilt of the son* (italics in original) and for this very reason these had to correspond with the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex (T.T.:185).

– namely to slay the father and to take the mother for a wife.

Thus, through showing the resemblance between the state of mind of the primitive savages and the neurotic, and with the help of a few assumptions, Freud shows that the two central taboos of totemism have their origin in the Oedipus complex. Even beyond that, he states that the Oedipus complex is the meeting ground of the beginnings of society, religion, art and ethics.

Here again it can be said that Freud's and Durkheim's books are complementary, as we see that through psychoanalytic explanations

Freud tries to find out the origin of the two main taboos of totemism, whereas Durkheim does not address prohibitions related to sexual contacts, although he indicates exogamy as an important rule of totemism.

Conclusion

In this review and evaluation of Durkheim's and Freud's discussions on prohibitions and taboos, it is reasonable to surmise that Freud and Durkheim's books taken together do offer us a broader understanding of prohibitions and taboos. However, we can also point out some of their differences. First, the basic approach of Durkheim is sociological, whereas Freud's approach is psychoanalytic – which are very different, if not opposite to one another. Second, the underlying assumptions generating from the different approaches mentioned above are also different. For Durkheim, the main broad underlying assumption is that collectivity or society is the origin of religion. His attempt is to find the fundamental characteristics of the most elementary religion. For Freud, the central broad assumption was that society, religion, art and ethics have originated in the Oedipus complex and the ambivalent feelings of man. Third, in his discussion on prohibitions Durkheim is only interested in how prohibitions play a significant role in keeping the sacred apart from the profane. The central concepts in Durkheim's discussion of the prohibitions are the sacred and the profane and the collectivity. For Freud, the central concepts are the ambivalence of emotions, omnipotence of thought and the Oedipus complex. Freud attempts to show how these factors are behind all taboos of primitive people by comparing them with the phobia and prohibitions developed by neurotics. Fourth, Freud always shows the logic (either the ambivalence of emotions or the omnipotence of thought) behind each taboo, whereas Durkheim does not show how and why an object, person, or act can be ascribed the position of being sacred to the clansmen, the sacredness of which is to be protected through prohibitions. It is not Durkheim's purpose to delve into the subconscious, or the unconscious. In our discussion of the differences of the details of Durkheim's and Freud's work into the nature of primitive religion, we should also make clear their overall purpose and objectives in initiating their research. The purpose of Durkheim's investigation into the origins of religion was to show that religious rites were the source of both concepts and society. Our basic concepts such as time, space, number, personality, cause and the distinction between the sacred and the profane are not *a priori* nor do they exist without problems in things around us. To show this process, Durkheim emphasised how prohibitions maintained the distinction

between the sacred and the profane for the whole collectivity, that appear to be a lasting evidence of the "collective effervescence" which in the distant past made both conceptual thinking and society possible.

Freud's purpose in his investigations into primitive religions was to show that the ancient symbolism of the totem was the consequence of the events caused by the violent and intense instincts of man. This is not to suggest that "primitive man" had more primitive and violent instincts than "civilised man." Instead, it is to show that our instincts are still savage as they are with us today. The suppression of these instincts and their expression through iconic imagery (totems) was and remains much of the basis for both primitive and modern societies, especially with regard to religion.

Despite their differences mentioned above, Durkheim's and Freud's books are primarily complementary in our understanding of the concept of prohibitions/taboo. While Durkheim only looks at prohibitions as an essential part of religion – to keep the sacred apart from the profane – Freud takes one step further in trying to explain how these taboos originated. Freud regards taboos as different from religious prohibitions and as a predecessor of religion. Hence, he discusses some taboos which Durkheim does not address. For example, Freud elaborates on taboos related to enemies and rulers/chiefs, which Durkheim does not mention. Although Durkheim indicates the prohibitions of sexual contact as an essential part of Australian totemism, he does not discuss it in detail. Freud, on the other hand, goes as far as tracing the origin of this very important taboo. Durkheim, however, elaborates far more than Freud on the prohibitions related to women, uninitiated men, religious rites and sacred objects.

In explaining how prohibitions related to totemism function, Durkheim refers to psychic mechanisms through which religious forces are imagined to take over the body of the violator of the prohibition. This psychic mechanism is explained in greater detail by Freud – although he takes this out of the realm of Durkheim's explanation toward the assertion that Oedipus complex is the origin of taboos. Thus even though Durkheim and Freud have different explanations for the different taboos, a reading of both the books indeed broadens our conception of prohibitions and taboos, and hence are complementary to one another.

We must keep in mind that although Freud assumes "a psyche of the mass in which psychic processes occur as in the psychic life of the individual" (T.T.:203), it is too simplifying to say that Freud's perspective is individualistic and Durkheim's social one. Rather, it can be said that they problematize civilization differently, having an overlap regarding the collective or the social. For Durkheim, through group living, egoism is subordinated to social forces, whereas for Freud, instinct is subordinated to the social forces. Hence, they differ in the

terms “egoism” and “instinct”, but agree on the domination of the social forces. In Durkheim’s view egoistic principles are always superseded by the concern for the cohesion of the collectivity, which are manifested in religious prohibitions. According to Freud, man’s instincts are suppressed through the imposition of taboos by society which originated in the Oedipus complex thousands of years back and have been transmitted from one generation to the next to the present. But for Freud, man is never truly socialised and his instinctual urges are always at odds with the demands of social life – always having the temptation to violate the taboos. Thus his theory leaves room for the explanation of behavior that is counter to the social order. Durkheim’s theory, on the other hand, focuses more on the nature of the social order itself. Taken together, the theories of Durkheim and Freud provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of primitive society precisely because they each explore these different aspects of social life.

Freud opens himself to criticisms by sociologists for some of his assumptions, which are not based on historical and logical evidence. Especially, the assumption which he makes regarding the joining together of the sons of the primal father who slew him but showed respect for him (resulting from ambivalent feelings) by establishing the two principal rules of totemism. Freud fails to show any historical evidence behind this assumption. Durkheim’s assumption about the prohibitions being derived from the need to keep the sacred apart from the profane seems more logical. However, he does not explain why sacredness is attributed to certain things in the first place, and why women and uninitiated men are regarded as the profane. Thus, there are some deficiencies in both the studies. But together, they offer us a better understanding of prohibitions and taboos from two different perspectives.

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