The Efficiency of Social Psychology: Sociology of a Technocratic Belief under the French Fourth Republic

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During the 17th-century, the French philosopher Rene Descartes introduced the idea of dualism, which asserted that the mind and body were two entities that interact to form the human experience. Many other issues still debated by psychologists today, such as the relative contributions of nature vs. nurture, are rooted in these early philosophical traditions. Recent research in psychology looks at many aspects of the human experience, from the biological influences on behavior on the impact of social and cultural factors. Today, the majority of psychologists do not identify themselves with a single school of thought. Instead, they often focus on a particular specialty area or perspective, often drawing on ideas from a range of theoretical backgrounds. A French philosopher and sociologist, Durkheim stressed the importance of studying social facts, or patterns of behavior characteristic of a particular group. The phenomenon of suicide especially interested Durkheim. But he did not limit his ideas on the topic to mere speculation. Because of the ties between objective behavior and subjective interpretation, Weber believed that sociologists must inquire into people's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions regarding their own behaviors. Weber recommended that sociologists adopt his method of Verstehen (vûrst e hen), or empathetic understanding. Verstehen allows sociologists...
to mentally put themselves into "the other person's shoes" and thus obtain an "interpretive understanding" of the meanings of individuals' behaviors. A dictionary defines sociology as the systematic study of society and social interaction. The word “sociology” is derived from the Latin word socius (companion) and the Greek word logos (speech or reason), which together mean "reasoned speech about companionship". How can the experience of companionship or togetherness be put into words or explained? The different rates of suicide had to be explained by macro-level variables associated with the different religious beliefs and practices of the faith communities. We will return to this example in more detail later.