

Durkheim on Crime

Sociology

The counter-intuitive claim that crime is normal and even useful.

Durkheim's argument that some crime is found in every society, is therefore normal, and performs functions for the group that punishes it.

CLAIM

normal, within limits

FUNCTIONS

boundary, change

- Universal, so normal rather than pathological.
- Punishment reaffirms the boundary publicly.
- Some deviance is the first sign of needed change.
- Too much crime signals a breakdown of regulation.
- Anomie: norms fail to keep pace with change.
- A society of saints would still find offenders.

LOOK FOR IT

Acts once prosecuted are now lawful in many states, and the shift began with people who broke the rule.

Educational reference. Functional does not mean desirable, and Durkheim gives no method for locating the healthy level.