

# 3 ÉMILE DURKHEIM (1858–1917)



## Key Concepts

- Anomie
- Social facts
- Social solidarity
  - Mechanical solidarity
  - Organic solidarity
- Collective conscience
- Ritual
- Symbol
- Sacred and profane
- Collective representations

*There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which makes its unity and its personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments.*

(Durkheim 1912/1995:474–75)

**H**ave you ever been to a professional sports event in a stadium full of fans? Or to a religious service and taken communion, or to a concert and danced in the aisles (or maybe in a mosh pit)? How did these experiences make you feel? What do they have in common? Is it possible to have this same type of experience if or when you are alone? How so or why not?

These are the sorts of issues that intrigued Émile Durkheim. Above all, he sought to explain *what* held societies and social groups together—and *how*. In addressing these twin questions, Durkheim studied a wide variety of phenomena—from suicide and crime, to aboriginal religious totems and symbols. He was especially concerned about how modern, industrial societies can be held together when people don't even know each other and when their experiences and social positions are so varied. In other words, how can social ties, the very basis for society, be maintained in such an increasingly individualistic world?

Yet Durkheim is an important figure in the history of sociology not only because of his provocative theories about social cohesion, but also because he helped found the discipline of sociology. In contrast to some of the other figures whose works you will read in this book, Durkheim sought to delineate, both theoretically and methodologically, how sociology was different from existing schools of philosophy and history, which also examined social issues. Before we discuss his ideas and work, however, let's look at his biography because, like Marx, Durkheim's personal experiences and historical situation deeply influenced his perception and description of the social world.

## A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ■■

Émile Durkheim was born in a small town in northeastern France in 1858. In his youth, he followed family tradition, studying Hebrew and the Talmud in order to become a rabbi. However, in his adolescence, Durkheim apparently rejected Judaism. Though he did not disdain traditional religion, as a child of the Enlightenment (see Chapter 1) he came to consider both Christianity and Judaism outmoded in the modern world.

In 1879, Durkheim entered France's most prestigious college, the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris, to study philosophy. However, by his third year, Durkheim had become disenchanted with the high-minded, literary, humanities curriculum at the Normale. He decided to pursue sociology, which he viewed as eminently more scientific, democratic, and practical. Durkheim still maintained his interest in complex philosophical questions, but he wanted to examine them through a "rational," "scientific" lens. His practical and scientific approach to central social issues would shape his ambition to use sociological methods as a means for reconstituting the moral order of French society, which he saw decaying in the aftermath of the French Revolution (Bellah 1973:xiii–xvi). Durkheim was especially concerned about the abuse of power by political and military leaders, increasing rates of divorce and suicide, and rising anti-Semitism. It seemed to Durkheim that social bonds and a sense of community had broken down and social disorder had come to prevail.<sup>1</sup>

Upon graduation from the *École Normale*, Durkheim began teaching in small lycées (secondary schools) near Paris. In 1887, he married Louise Dreyfus, from the Alsace region of France. In the same year, Durkheim began his career as a professor at the University of

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<sup>1</sup>As indicated in Chapter 1, France had gone through numerous violent changes in government since the French Revolution in 1789. Between 1789 and 1870, there had been three monarchies, two empires, and two republics, culminating in the notorious reign of Napoleon III who overthrew the democratic government and ruled France for 20 years. Though the French Revolution had brought a brief period of democracy, it also sparked a terrifying persecution of all those who disagreed with the revolutionary leaders. Some 17,000 revolutionaries were executed in the infamous Reign of Terror, led by Maximilien Robespierre. Consequently, political and social divisions in France intensified. French conservatives called for a return to monarchy and a more prominent role for the Catholic Church. In direct contrast, a growing but still relatively small class of urban workers demanded political rights and a secular rather than religious education. At the same time, capitalists called for individual rights and free markets, while radical socialists advocated abolishing private property altogether.

Bordeaux, where he quickly gained the reputation for being a committed and exciting teacher. Émile and Louise soon had two children, Marie and André.

Durkheim was a serious and productive scholar. His first book, *The Division of Labor in Society*, which was based on his doctoral dissertation, came out in 1893; his second, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, appeared just two years later. In 1897, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, perhaps his most well known work, was published. The next year, Durkheim founded the journal *L'Année Sociologique*, which was one of the first sociology journals not only in France, but also in the world. *L'Année Sociologique* was produced annually until the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

In 1902, with his reputation as a leading social philosopher and scientist established, Durkheim was offered a position at the prestigious Sorbonne University in Paris. As he had done previously at Bordeaux, Durkheim quickly gained a large following at the Sorbonne. His education courses were compulsory for all students seeking teaching degrees in philosophy, history, literature, and languages. Durkheim also became an important administrator at the Sorbonne, serving on numerous councils and committees (Lukes 1985:372).

Yet not everyone was enamored with either Durkheim's substantial power or his ideas. Durkheim's notion that *any* social "thing"—including religion—could be studied sociologically (i.e., scientifically) was particularly controversial, as was his adamant insistence on providing students a moral, but secular, education. (These two issues will be discussed further below.) As Steven Lukes (1985:373), noted sociologist and Durkheim scholar, remarked, "To friends he was a prophet and an apostle, but to enemies he was a secular pope."

Moreover, Durkheim identified with some of the goals of socialism, but was unwilling to commit himself politically. He believed that sociologists should be committed to education, not political activism. His passion was for dispassionate, scientific research.

This apparent apoliticism, coupled with his focus on the moral constitution of societies (rather than conflict and revolution), has led some analysts to deem Durkheim politically conservative. However, as the eminent sociologist Robert Bellah (1973: xviii) points out, "to try to force Durkheim into the conservative side of some conservative/liberal dichotomy" is inappropriate. It ignores Durkheim's "lifelong preoccupation with orderly, continuous social change toward greater social justice" (ibid.:xvii). In addition, to consider Durkheim politically conservative is erroneous in light of how he was evaluated in his day. Durkheim was viewed as a radical modernist and liberal, who, though respectful of religion, was most committed to rationality, science, and humanism. Durkheim infuriated religious conservatives, who desired to replace democracy with a monarchy, and to strengthen the military. He also came under fire because he opposed instituting Catholic education as the basic curriculum.

Moreover, to label Durkheim "conservative" ignores his role in the "Dreyfus affair." Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish army colonel who was charged and convicted on false charges of spying for Germany. The charges against Dreyfus were rooted in anti-Semitism, which was growing in the 1890s, alongside France's military losses and economic dissatisfaction. Durkheim was very active in the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (League of the Rights of Men), which devoted itself to clearing Dreyfus of all charges.

Interestingly, Durkheim's assessment of the Dreyfus affair reflects his lifelong concern for the moral order of society. He saw the Dreyfus affair as symptomatic of a collective moral sickness, rather than merely anti-Semitism at the level of the individual. As Durkheim (1899, as cited by Lukes 1985:345) states,

[w]hen society undergoes suffering, it feels the need to find someone whom it can hold responsible for its sickness, on whom it can avenge its misfortunes; and those against whom public opinion already discriminates are naturally designated for this role. These are the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. What confirms me in this interpretation

is the way in which the result of Dreyfus's trial was greeted in 1894. There was a surge of joy in the boulevards. People celebrated as a triumph what should have been a cause of public mourning. At least they knew whom to blame for the economic troubles and moral distress in which they lived. The trouble came from the Jews. The charge had been officially proved. By this very fact alone, things already seemed to be getting better and people felt consoled.

In 1912, Durkheim's culminating work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, was published. Shortly after that, World War I broke out, and Durkheim's life was thrown into turmoil. His son, André, was killed in battle, spiraling Durkheim into a grief from which he never fully recovered. On October 7, 1916, as he was leaving a committee meeting at the Sorbonne, Durkheim suffered a stroke. He spent the next year resting and seemed to have made much progress toward recovering. But on November 15, 1917, while in Fontainebleau where he had gone for peace and fresh air, Durkheim died. He was 59 years old (Lukes 1985:559).

## INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES AND CORE IDEAS ■

As indicated previously, Durkheim wrote a number of books and articles on a wide variety of topics. Nevertheless, there are two major themes that transcend all of Durkheim's work. First, Durkheim sought to articulate the nature of society and, hence, his view of sociology as an academic discipline. Durkheim argued that society was a supraindividual force existing independently of the actors who compose it. The task of sociology, then, is to analyze **social facts**—conditions and circumstances external to the individual that, nevertheless, determine the individual's course of action. Durkheim argued that social facts can be ascertained by using collective data, such as suicide and divorce rates. In other words, through systematic collection of data, the patterns behind and within individual behavior can be uncovered. This emphasis on formal methods and objective data is what distinguished sociology from philosophy and put sociology “on the map” as a viable scientific discipline. The significance of Durkheim's position for the development of sociology as a distinct pursuit of knowledge cannot be overstated. As one of the first academics to hold a position in sociology, Durkheim was on the cutting edge of the birth of the discipline. Nevertheless, his conviction that society is *sui generis* (an objective reality that is irreducible to the individuals that compose it) and amenable to scientific investigation owes much to the work of **Auguste Comte** (1798–1857). Not only had Comte coined the term *sociology* in 1839, but he also contended that the social world could be studied in as rational and scientific a way as physical scientists (chemists, physicists, biologists, etc.) study their respective domains. Moreover, Durkheim's comparative and historical methodology was in large measure a continuation of the approach advocated earlier by Comte.

### Significant Others

#### **Auguste Comte (1798–1857): The Father of “Social Physics”**

Born in southern France during a most turbulent period in French history, Auguste Comte was himself a turbulent figure. Though he excelled as a student, he had little patience for authority. Indeed, his obstinate temperament prevented him from completing his studies at the newly established *École Polytechnique*, Paris's elite university. Nevertheless, Comte was able to make a name for himself in the intellectual

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circles of Paris. In 1817, he began working as a secretary and collaborator to Henri Saint-Simon. Their productive though fractious relationship came to an end seven years later in a dispute over assigning authorship to one of Comte's essays. Comte next set about developing his system of positivist philosophy while working in minor academic positions for meager wages. Beginning in 1826, Comte offered a series of private lectures in an effort to disseminate his views. Though attended by eminent thinkers, the grandiosity of his theoretical system led some to dismiss his ideas. Nevertheless, Comte continued undeterred: from 1830 to 1842, he worked single-mindedly on his magnum opus, the six-volume *The Positive Philosophy* (1830–42/1974). In the series, Comte not only outlines his “Law of Three Stages” (which posits that science develops through three mentally conceived stages: (1) the theological stage, (2) the metaphysical stage, and (3) the positive stage) but also delineates the proper methods for his new science of “social physics” as well as its fundamental task—the study of social statics (order) and dynamics (progress). The work was well received in some scientific quarters, and Comte seemed poised to establish himself as a first-rate scholar. Unfortunately, his temperament again proved to be a hindrance to his success, both personal and professional. His troubled marriage ended soon after *Positive Philosophy* was completed, and his petulance further alienated him from friends and colleagues while costing him a position at the École Polytechnique. Comte's life took a turn for the better, however, when in 1844 he met and fell in love with Clotilde de Vaux. Their affair did not last long; Clotilde developed tuberculosis and died within a year of their first meeting. Comte dedicated the rest of his life to “his angel.” In her memory, he founded the Religion of Humanity for which he proclaimed himself the high priest. The new church was founded on the principle of universal love as Comte abandoned his earlier commitment to science and positivism. Until his death in 1857, Comte sought not supporters for his system of science, but converts to his Positive Church.

NOTE: This account of Comte's biography is based largely on Lewis Coser's (1977) discussion in *Masters of Sociological Thought*.

### Significant Others

#### Herbert Spencer (1820–1903): Survival of the Fittest

Born in the English Midlands, Herbert Spencer's early years were shaped largely by his father and uncle. It was from these two men that Spencer received his education, an education that centered on math, physics, and chemistry. Moreover, it was from them that Spencer was exposed to the radical religious and social doctrines that would inform his staunch individualism. With little formal instruction in history, literature, and languages, Spencer conceded to the limits of his education, and at the age of sixteen declined to attend university, opting instead to pursue a “practical” career as an engineer for the London and Birmingham Railway. Nevertheless, he would prove to be an avid student of and a prolific writer on a range of social and philosophical topics.

With the completion of the railway in 1841, Spencer earned his living by writing essays for a number of radical journals and newspapers. Of particular note is a series

of 12 letters he published through a dissenting newspaper, *The Nonconformist*. Titled “The Proper Sphere of Government,” the letters are an early expression of Spencer’s decidedly laissez-faire perspective. In them, Spencer argued that the role of government should be restricted solely to policing, while all other matters, including education, social welfare, and economic activities, should be left to the private sector. According to Spencer, government regulations interfere with the laws of human evolution that, if left unhampered, ensure the “survival of the fittest.” It is not hard to see that Spencer’s view of government still resonates with many American politicians and voters. Less sanguine, however, is the racism and sexism that was interjected into Spencer’s argument. Following the logic of his view, those who don’t survive—that is, succeed—are merely fulfilling their evolutionary destiny. To the extent that women and people of color are less “successful” than white males, their “success” and “failure” hinge not only on individual aptitude and effort, but also on institutional and cultural dynamics that sustain a less-than-level playing field.

A second major theme found in Durkheim’s work is the issue of **social solidarity**, or the cohesion of social groups. As you will see, all of the selections in this chapter—from *The Division of Labor in Society*, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, *Suicide*, and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*—explore the nature of the bonds that hold individuals and social groups together. Durkheim was especially concerned about modern societies where people often don’t know their neighbors (let alone everyone in the larger community) or worship together, and where people often hold jobs in impersonal companies and organizations. Durkheim wondered *how* individuals could feel tied to one another in such an increasingly individualistic world. This issue was of utmost importance, for he maintained that, without some semblance of solidarity and moral cohesion, society could not exist.

In his emphasis on the nature of solidarity in “traditional” and “modern” societies, Durkheim again drew on Comte’s work as well as that of the British sociologist **Herbert Spencer** (1820–1903).<sup>2</sup> Both Comte and Spencer formulated an organic view of society to explain the developmental paths along which societies allegedly evolve. Such a view depicted society as a system of interrelated parts (religious institutions, the economy, government, the family) that work together to form a unitary, stable whole, analogous to how the parts of the human body (lungs, kidneys, brain) function interdependently to sustain its general well-being. Moreover, as the organism (society and the body) grows in size, it becomes increasingly complex, due to the differentiation of its parts.

However, Durkheim was only partially sympathetic to the organic, evolutionary models developed by Comte and Spencer. On the one hand, Durkheim’s insistence that social solidarity is rooted in shared moral sentiments, and the sense of obligation they evoke, stems from Comte (as well as from Jean-Jacques Rousseau; see Chapter 1). Likewise, his notion that the specialized division of labor characteristic of modern societies leads to greater interdependency and integration owes much to Comte (as well as to Saint-Simon; see Chapter 2).

<sup>2</sup>Durkheim was influenced by a number of scholars, and not only by Comte and Spencer. Some of the more important figures in developing his views were the French Enlightenment intellectuals Charles Montesquieu (1689–75) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), Charles Renouvier (1815–1903), and the German experimental psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920).

Nevertheless, Durkheim did not embrace Comte's assertion that all societies progress through a series of identifiable evolutionary stages. In particular, he dismissed Comte's "Law of Three Stages," wherein all societies—as well as individual intellectual development—are said to pass from a theological stage characterized by "militaristic" communities led by priests, to a metaphysical stage organized according to "legalistic" principles and controlled by lawyers and clergy, and finally to a positivist or scientific stage in which "industrial" societies are governed by technocrats and, of course, sociologists.

In terms of Spencer, Durkheim was most influenced by Spencer's theory on the evolution of societies. According to Spencer, just as biological organisms become more differentiated as they grow and mature, so do small-scale, homogeneous communities become increasingly complex and diverse as a result of population growth. The individuals living in simple societies are minimally dependent on one another for meeting their survival and that of the community as they each carry out similar tasks. As the size of the population increases, however, similarity or likeness is replaced by heterogeneity and a specialized division of labor. Individuals become interdependent on one another as essential tasks are divided among the society's inhabitants. As a result, an individual's well-being becomes tied more and more to the general welfare of the larger society. Ensuring the functional integration of individuals now becomes the central issue for the survival of the society.

In this regard, Durkheim's perspective is compatible with that of Spencer. As further discussed below, Durkheim hypothesized that a different *kind* of solidarity was prevalent in modern—as opposed to smaller, more traditional—societies. Durkheim's equation of traditional societies with "mechanical" solidarity and modern societies with "organic" solidarity (discussed on pp. 103–105) shares an affinity with Spencer's classification of societies as either "simple" or "compound."

However, the two theorists diverge on the crucial point of integration. Spencer saw society as composed of atomistic individuals, each pursuing lines of self-interested conduct. In a classic expression of utilitarian philosophy, Spencer maintained that a stable, well-functioning social whole is the outgrowth of individuals freely seeking to maximize their advantages.

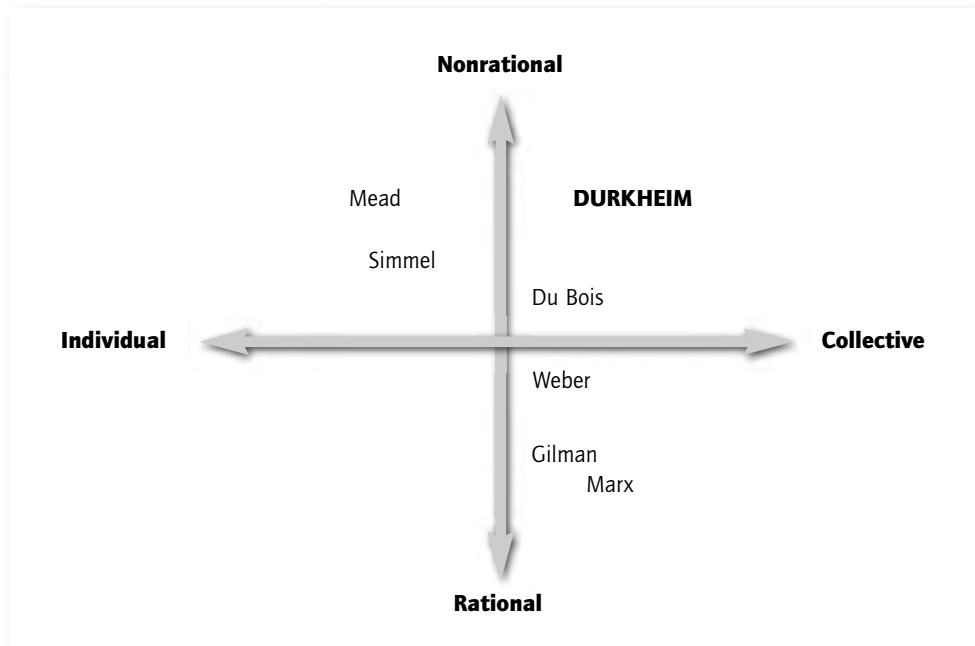
By contrast, Durkheim (and Comte) took a far less utilitarian approach than Spencer. Durkheim emphasized that society is not a result or aftereffect of individual conduct; rather, it exists prior to, and thus shapes, individual action. In other words, individual lines of conduct are the outgrowth of social arrangements, particularly those connected to the developmental stage of the division of labor. Social integration, then, cannot be an unintended consequence of an aggregate of individuals pursuing their self-interest. Instead, it is rooted in a shared moral code, for only it can sustain a harmonious social order. And it is this moral code, along with the feelings of solidarity it generates, that forms the basis of all societies. Without the restraints imposed by a sense of moral obligation to others, the selfish pursuit of interests would destroy the social fabric.

## ■ DURKHEIM'S THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

As discussed previously, Durkheim was most concerned with analyzing "social facts": he sought to uncover the preexisting social conditions that shape the parameters for individual behavior. Consequently, Durkheim can be said to take a predominantly collectivist approach to order (see Figure 3.1).

This approach is most readily apparent in *Suicide*. In this study, Durkheim begins with one of the most seemingly individualistic, psychologically motivated acts there is—suicide—in order to illuminate the social and moral parameters behind and within this allegedly "individual" behavior. So too, Durkheim's emphasis on **collective conscience**

Figure 3.1 Durkheim's Basic Theoretical Orientation

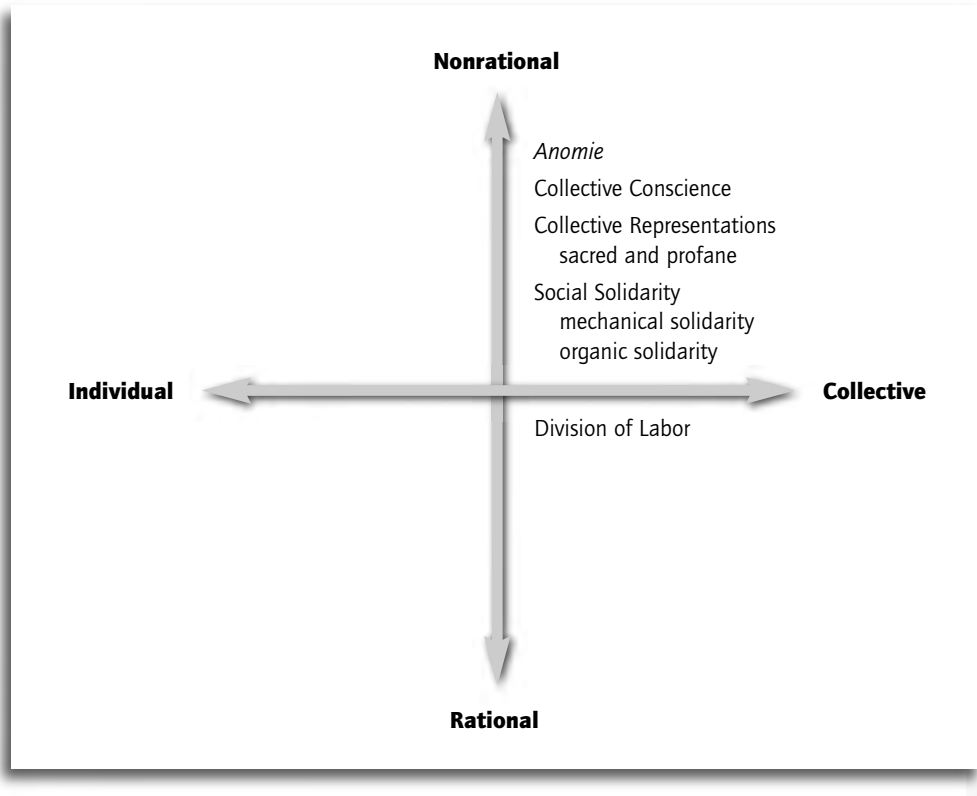


and **collective representations** indicates an interest in the collective level of society (see Figure 3.2). By *collective conscience*, Durkheim means the “totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society” that “forms a determinate system which has its own life” (Durkheim 1893/1984:38–39). In later work, Durkheim used the term *collective representations* to refer to much the same thing. In any case, the point is that Durkheim’s main concern is not with the conscious or psychological state of specific individuals, but rather with the collective beliefs and sentiments that exist “independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed; they pass on and it remains” (ibid.:80).

This leads us to one of the most common criticisms of Durkheim. Because of his preoccupation with social facts and the collective conscience, it is often claimed that he overlooks the role of the individual in producing and reproducing the social order. Durkheim’s emphasis on the power of the group makes it seem like we’re just vessels for society’s will. Yet this criticism ignores two essential points: First, Durkheim not only acknowledged individual autonomy, but also took it for granted as an inevitable condition of modern societies. Durkheim sought to show how, in modern societies, increasing individuation could produce detrimental effects because individuals are often torn between competing normative prescriptions and rules. For instance, in *Suicide*, Durkheim maintains that, rather than rest comfortably on all-pervasive norms and values, “a thirst arises for novelties, unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations, all of which lose their savor once known . . . [but that] all these new sensations in their infinite quantity cannot form a solid foundation for happiness to support one in days of trial” (Durkheim 1897/1951:256). To be sure, the criticism could still be made that Durkheim ignores individual agency in “traditional” societies based on mechanical solidarity. In these societies, Durkheim did in fact posit a lack of individual autonomy, perhaps reflecting the Enlightenment-driven, Eurocentric thinking of his day. (We discuss this issue more fully below.)



Figure 3.2 Durkheim's Core Concepts



Relatedly, to assert that his orientation was singularly collectivist overlooks Durkheim's assumption that collective life emerges *in* social interaction. For instance, a major part of his analysis of the elementary forms of religious life involved showing how mundane objects, such as lizards and plants, take on the sacredness of the totem (the symbol of the tribe) by virtue of individuals coming together to participate in ritual practices. Similarly, in his study of suicide, Durkheim examined marriage and divorce rates not simply because he was fascinated by abstract, collective dimensions of social life, but also because he wanted to uncover objective factors that measure the extent to which individuals are bound together in an increasingly individualistic world.

This leads us to the issue of action. In our view, Durkheim is primarily nonrationalist in his orientation (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2). He focused on how collective representations and moral sentiments are a motivating force, much more so than "rational" or strategic interests connected to economic or political institutions. Yet it is important to point out that in emphasizing the external nature of social facts Durkheim also recognized that such facts are not confined to the realm of ideas or feelings, but often possess a concrete reality as well. For instance, educational institutions and penal systems are also decisive for shaping the social order and individuals' actions within it. Thus, social facts are capable of exerting both a moral and an institutional force. In the end, however, Durkheim stressed the nonrational aspect of social facts as suggested in his supposition that the penal system (courts, legal codes and their enforcement, etc.) ultimately rests on collective notions of morality, a complex symbolic system as to what is "right" and what is "wrong." This issue will be discussed further in the next section in relationship to the specific selections you will read.

## Readings

In this section, you will read selections from the four major books that Durkheim published during his lifetime: *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), *Suicide* (1897), and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). We begin with *The Division of Labor in Society*, in which Durkheim set out the key concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity, and collective conscience. We then shift to excerpts from *The Rules of Sociological Method*. It is here, as you will see, that Durkheim first laid out his basic conceptualization of sociology as a discipline and delineated his concept of social facts. This is followed by excerpts from *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, which is notable, first, in that it exemplifies Durkheim's distinctive approach to the study of the social world, and second, because it further delineates Durkheim's core concept of *anomie*. We conclude this chapter with excerpts from *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, which many theorists consider Durkheim's most theoretically significant work. In it, Durkheim takes an explicitly cultural turn, emphasizing the concepts of ritual and symbol, and the sacred and profane, and collective representations.

### Introduction to *The Division of Labor in Society*

In Durkheim's first major work, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), which was based on his doctoral dissertation, Durkheim explains how the division of labor (or economic specialization) characteristic of modern societies affects individuals as well as society as a whole. As you may recall, this issue had been of utmost concern to Marx as well. Marx contended that modern, competitive capitalism, and the specialized division of labor that sustained it, resulted in alienation. In contrast, Durkheim argued that economic specialization was not necessarily "bad" for either the individual or the society as a whole. Instead, he argued that an extensive division of labor could exist without necessarily jeopardizing the moral cohesion of a society or the opportunity for individuals to realize their interests.

How is this possible? Durkheim argued that there were two basic types of solidarity: mechanical and organic.<sup>1</sup> **Mechanical solidarity** is typified by feelings of *likeness*. Mechanical solidarity is rooted in everyone doing/feeling the same thing. Durkheim maintained that this type of solidarity is characteristic of small, traditional societies. In these "simple" societies, circumstances compel individuals to be generalists involved in the production and distribution of a variety of goods. Indeed, in small, traditional societies, specialization in one task to the exclusion of others is not possible because the society depends on each individual providing a host of contributions to the group. For instance, men, women, and children are often all needed to pick crops at harvest time, and all partake in the harvest-time celebrations as well.

Durkheim argued that a significant social consequence of the shared work experience characteristic of traditional societies is a shared collective conscience. People in traditional

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<sup>1</sup>Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity was developed, in part, as a critical response to the work of the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (see Significant Others box, Chapter 6, pp. 274–275). In his book, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft (Community and Society)*, Tönnies argued that simpler, traditional societies (*Gemeinschaft*) were more "organic" and beneficial to the formation of social bonds. In contrast to Tönnies's conservative orientation, Durkheim contended that complex, modern societies were, in fact, more "organic" and thus more desirable because they promote individual liberties within a context of morally binding, shared social obligations.



**Photo 3.1a** Durkheim maintained that different types of society exhibit different types of solidarity. Mechanical solidarity, based on likeness, is characteristic of small, traditional societies, such as this village in Namibia (Africa).



**Photo 3.1b** Organic solidarity, based on specialization, is characteristic of large, modern industrial societies, such as Brasília (Brazil).

societies tend to feel “one and the same,” and it is this feeling of “oneness” that is integral in the maintenance of social order.

Yet, Durkheim saw that in large, complex societies, this type of solidarity was waning. In large, modern societies, labor is specialized; people do not necessarily all engage in the same work or share the same ideas and beliefs. For Durkheim, **organic solidarity** refers to a type of solidarity in which each person is interdependent with others, forming a complex web of cooperative associations. In such situations, solidarity (or a feeling of “oneness”) comes not from each person believing/doing the same thing, but from each person cultivating individual differences and knowing that each is doing her part for the good of the whole. Thus, Durkheim argued that the increasing specialization and individuation so readily apparent in modern industrial societies does not necessarily result in a decline in social stability or cohesion. Rather, the growth in a society’s density (the number of people living in a community) and consequent increasingly specialized division of labor can result in simply a different *type* of social cohesion.

Significantly, however, Durkheim maintained that organic solidarity does not automatically emerge in modern societies. Rather, it arises only when the division of labor is “spontaneous” or voluntary. States Durkheim, “For the division of labor to produce solidarity, it is not sufficient, then, that each have his task; it is still necessary that this task be fitting to him” (Durkheim 1893/1984:375). Moreover, a “normal” division of labor exists only when the specialization of tasks is not exaggerated. If the division of labor is pushed too far, there is a danger for the individual to become “isolated in his special activity.” In such cases, the division of labor becomes “a source of disintegration” for both the individual and society (ibid.). The individual “no longer feels the idea of common work being done by those who work side by side with him” (ibid.). Meanwhile, a rigid division of labor can lead to “the institution of classes and castes . . . [which] is often a source of dissension” (ibid.:374). Durkheim used the term **anomie** (a lack of moral regulation) to describe the “pathological” consequences of an overly specialized division of labor. This is a pivotal concept to which we will shortly return.

Most interestingly, then, the important point is not that Durkheim ignored the potentially harmful aspects of the division of labor in modern societies; on the contrary, Durkheim acknowledged that the division of labor is problematic when it is “forced” or pushed to an extreme. This position offers an important similarity as well as difference to that offered by Marx. As we noted previously, Marx saw both alienation and class conflict as inevitable (or “normal”) in capitalist societies. By contrast, rather than seeing social conflict as a “normal” condition of capitalism, Durkheim maintained that anomie results only in “abnormal” conditions of overspecialization, when the rules of capitalism become too rigid and individuals are “forced” into a particular position in the division of labor.

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## From *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893)

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Émile Durkheim

### INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM

The division of labor is not of recent origin, but it was only at the end of the eighteenth century that social cognizance was taken of

the principle, though, until then, unwitting submission had been rendered to it. To be sure, several thinkers from earliest times saw its importance;<sup>1</sup> but Adam Smith was the first to attempt a theory of it. Moreover, he

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<sup>1</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, E, 1133a, 16.

adopted this phrase that social science later lent to biology.

Nowadays, the phenomenon has developed so generally it is obvious to all. We need have no further illusions about the tendencies of modern industry; it advances steadily towards powerful machines, towards great concentrations of forces and capital, and consequently to the extreme division of labor. Occupations are infinitely separated and specialized, not only inside the factories, but each product is itself a specialty dependent upon others. Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill still hoped that agriculture, at least, would be an exception to the rule, and they saw it as the last resort of small-scale industry. Although one must be careful not to generalize unduly in such matters, nevertheless it is hard to deny today that the principal branches of the agricultural industry are steadily being drawn into the general movement. Finally, business itself is ingeniously following and reflecting in all its shadings the infinite diversity of industrial enterprises; and, while this evolution is realizing itself with unpremeditated spontaneity, the economists, examining its causes and appreciating its results, far from condemning or opposing it, uphold it as necessary. They see in it the supreme law of human societies and the condition of their progress. But the division of labor is not peculiar to the economic world; we can observe its growing influence in the most varied fields of society. The political, administrative, and judicial functions are growing more and more specialized. It is the same with the aesthetic and scientific functions. It is long since philosophy reigned as the science unique; it has been broken into a multitude of special disciplines each of which has its object, method, and though. "Men working in the sciences have become increasingly more specialized."<sup>ii</sup>

### MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY

We are now in a position to come to a conclusion.

The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society

forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the *collective* or *common conscience*. No doubt, it has not a specific organ as a substratum; it is, by definition, diffuse in every reach of society. Nevertheless, it has specific characteristics which make it a distinct reality. It is, in effect, independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed; they pass on and it remains. It is the same in the North and in the South, in great cities and in small, in different professions. Moreover, it does not change with each generation, but, on the contrary, it connects successive generations with one another. It is, thus, an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them. It is the psychological type of society, a type which has its properties, its conditions of existence, its mode of development, just as individual types, although in a different way. Thus understood, it has the right to be denoted by a special word. The one which we have just employed is not, it is true, without ambiguity. As the terms, *collective* and *social*, are often considered synonymous, one is inclined to believe that the collective conscience is the total social conscience, that is, extend it to include more than the psychic life of society, although, particularly in advanced societies, it is only a very restricted part. Judicial, governmental, scientific, industrial, in short, all special functions are of a psychic nature, since they consist in systems of representations and actions. They, however, are surely outside the common conscience. To avoid the confusion<sup>iii</sup> into which some have fallen, the best way would be to create a technical expression especially to designate the totality of social similitudes. However, since the use of a new word, when not absolutely necessary, is not without inconvenience, we shall employ the well-worn expression, *collective* or *common conscience*, but we shall always mean the strict sense in which we have taken it.

We can, then, to resume the preceding analysis, say that an act is criminal when it

<sup>ii</sup>De Candolle, *Histoire des Sciences et des Savants*, 2nd ed., p. 263.

<sup>iii</sup>The confusion is not without its dangers. Thus, we sometimes ask if the individual conscience varies as the collective conscience. It all depends upon the sense in which the word is taken. If it represents social likenesses, the variation is inverse, as we shall see. If it signifies the total psychic life of society, the relation is direct. It is thus necessary to distinguish them.

offends strong and defined states of the collective conscience.<sup>iv</sup>

The statement of this proposition is not generally called into question, but it is ordinarily given a sense very different from that which it ought to convey. We take it as if it expressed, not the essential property of crime, but one of its repercussions. We well know that crime violates very pervasive and intense sentiments, but we believe that this pervasiveness and this intensity derive from the criminal character of the act, which consequently remains to be defined. We do not deny that every delict is universally reprobated, but we take as agreed that the reprobation to which it is subjected results from its delictness. But we are hard put to say what this delictness consists of. In immorality which is particularly serious? I wish such were the case, but that is to reply to the question by putting one word in place of another, for it is precisely the problem to understand what this immorality is, and especially this particular immorality which society reproves by means of organized punishment and which constitutes criminality. It can evidently come only from one or several characteristics common to all criminological types. The only one which would satisfy this condition is that opposition between a crime, whatever it is, and certain collective sentiments. It is, accordingly, this opposition which makes crime rather than being a derivative of crime. In other words, we must not say that an action shocks the common conscience because it is criminal, but rather that it is criminal because it shocks the common conscience. We do not reprove it because it is a crime, but it is a crime because we reprove it. As for the intrinsic nature of these sentiments, it is impossible to specify them. They have the most diverse objects and cannot be encompassed in a single formula. We can say that they relate neither to vital interests of society nor to a minimum of justice. All these definitions are inadequate. By this alone can we recognize it: a sentiment, whatever its origin and end, is found in all consciences with a certain degree of force and precision, and every action which violates it is a crime. Contemporary psychology is more and more reverting to the idea of Spinoza, according to which things are good

because we like them, as against our liking them because they are good. What is primary is the tendency, the inclination; the pleasure and pain are only derivative facts. It is just so in social life. An act is socially bad because society disproves of it. But, it will be asked, are there not some collective sentiments which result from pleasure and pain which society feels from contact with their ends? No doubt, but they do not all have this origin. A great many, if not the larger part, come from other causes. Everything that leads activity to assume a definite form can give rise to habits, whence result tendencies which must be satisfied. Moreover, it is these latter tendencies which alone are truly fundamental. The others are only special forms and more determinate. Thus, to find charm in such and such an object, collective sensibility must already be constituted so as to be able to enjoy it. If the corresponding sentiments are abolished, the most harmful act to society will not only be tolerated, but even honored and proposed as an example. Pleasure is incapable of creating an impulse out of whole cloth; it can only link those sentiments which exist to such and such a particular end, provided that the end be in accord with their original nature. . . .

## ORGANIC SOLIDARITY

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Since negative solidarity does not produce any integration by itself, and since, moreover, there is nothing specific about it, we shall recognize only two kinds of positive solidarity which are distinguishable by the following qualities:

1. The first binds the individual directly to society without any intermediary. In the second, he depends upon society, because he depends upon the parts of which it is composed.
2. Society is not seen in the same aspect in the two cases. In the first, what we call society is a more or less organized totality of beliefs and sentiments common to all the members of the group: this is the collective type. On the other hand, the society in which we are solitary in the

<sup>iv</sup>We shall not consider the question whether the collective conscience is a conscience as is that of the individual. By this term, we simply signify the totality of social likenesses, without prejudging the category by which this system of phenomena ought to be defined.

second instance is a system of different, special functions which definite relations unite. These two societies really make up only one. They are two aspects of one and the same reality, but none the less they must be distinguished.

3. From this second difference there arises another which helps us to characterize and name the two kinds of solidarity.

The first can be strong only if the ideas and tendencies common to all the members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those which pertain personally to each member. It is as much stronger as the excess is more considerable. But what makes our personality is how much of our own individual qualities we have, what distinguishes us from others. This solidarity can grow only in inverse ratio to personality. There are in each of us, as we have said, two consciences: one which is common to our group in its entirety, which, consequently, is not *ourselves*, but society living and acting within us; the other, on the contrary, represents that in us which is personal and distinct, that which makes us an individual.<sup>v</sup> Solidarity which comes from likenesses is at its maximum when the collective conscience completely envelops our whole conscience and coincides in all points with it. But, at that moment, our individuality is nil. It can be born only if the community takes smaller toll of us. There are, here, two contrary forces, one centripetal, the other centrifugal, which cannot flourish at the same time. We cannot, at one and the same time, develop ourselves in two opposite senses. If we have a lively desire to think and act for ourselves, we cannot be strongly inclined to think and act as others do. If our ideal is to present a singular and personal appearance, we do not want to resemble everybody else. Moreover, at the moment when this solidarity exercises its force, our personality vanishes, as our definition permits us to say, for we are no longer ourselves, but the collective life.

The social molecules which can be coherent in this way can act together only in the measure that they have no actions of their own, as the molecules of inorganic bodies. That is why we

propose to call this type of solidarity mechanical. The term does not signify that it is produced by mechanical and artificial means. We call it that only by analogy to the cohesion which unites the elements of an inanimate body, as opposed to that which makes a unity out of the elements of a living body. What justifies this term is that the link which unites the individual to society is wholly analogous to that which attaches a thing to a person. The individual conscience, considered in this light, is a simple dependent upon the collective type and follows all of its movements, as the possessed object follows those of its owner. In societies where this type of solidarity is highly developed, the individual does not appear, as we shall see later. Individuality is something which the society possesses. Thus, in these social types, personal rights are not yet distinguished from real rights.

It is quite otherwise with the solidarity which the division of labor produces. Whereas the previous type implies that individuals resemble each other, this type presumes their difference. The first is possible only in so far as the individual personality is absorbed into the collective personality; the second is possible only if each one has a sphere of action which is peculiar to him; that is, a personality. It is necessary, then, that the collective conscience leave open a part of the individual conscience in order that special functions may be established there, functions which it cannot regulate. The more this region is extended, the stronger is the cohesion which results from this solidarity. In effect, on the one hand, each one depends as much more strictly on society as labor is more divided; and, on the other, the activity of each is as much more personal as it is more specialized. Doubtless, as circumscribed as it is, it is never completely original. Even in the exercise of our occupation, we conform to usages, to practices which are common to our whole professional brotherhood. But, even in this instance, the yoke that we submit to is much less heavy than when society completely controls us, and it leaves much more place open for the free play of our initiative. Here, then, the individuality of all

<sup>v</sup>However, these two consciences are not in regions geographically distinct from us, but penetrate from all sides.

grows at the same time as that of its parts. Society becomes more capable of collective movement, at the same time that each of its elements has more freedom of movement. This solidarity resembles that which we observe among the higher animals. Each organ, in effect, has its special physiognomy, its autonomy. And, moreover, the unity of the organism is as great as the individuation of the parts is more marked. Because of this analogy, we propose to call the solidarity which is due to the division of labor, organic. . . .

### THE CAUSES

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We can then formulate the following proposition: The division of labor varies in direct ratio with the volume and density of societies, and, if it progresses in a continuous manner in the course of social development, it is because societies become regularly denser and generally more voluminous.

At all times, it is true, it has been well understood that there was a relation between these two orders of fact, for, in order that functions be more specialized, there must be more co-operators, and they must be related to co-operate. But, ordinarily, this state of societies is seen only as the means by which the division of labor develops, and not as the cause of its development. The latter is made to depend upon individual aspirations toward well-being and happiness, which can be satisfied so much better as societies are more extensive and more condensed. The law we have just established is quite otherwise. We say, not that the growth and condensation of societies *permit*, but that they *necessitate* a greater division of labor. It is not

an instrument by which the latter is realized; it is its determining cause.<sup>vi</sup>

### THE FORCED DIVISION OF LABOR

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It is not sufficient that there be rules, however, for sometimes the rules themselves are the cause of evil. This is what occurs in class-wars. The institution of classes and of castes constitutes an organization of the division of labor, and it is a strictly regulated organization, although it often is a source of dissension. The lower classes not being, or no longer being, satisfied with the role which has devolved upon them from custom or by law aspire to functions which are closed to them and seek to dispossess those who are exercising these functions. Thus civil wars arise which are due to the manner in which labor is distributed.

There is nothing similar to this in the organism. No doubt, during periods of crises, the different tissues war against one another and nourish themselves at the expense of others. But never does one cell or organ seek to usurp a role different from the one which it is filling. The reason for this is that each anatomic element automatically executes its purpose. Its constitution, its place in the organism, determines its vocation; its task is a consequence of its nature. It can badly acquit itself, but it cannot assume another's task unless the latter abandons it, as happens in the rare cases of substitution that we have spoken of. It is not so in societies. Here the possibility is greater. There is a greater distance between the hereditary dispositions of the individual and the social function he will fill. The first do not imply the second with such immediate necessity. This space, open to striving and deliberation, is also at the mercy of a

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<sup>vi</sup>On this point, we can still rely on Comte as authority. "I must," he said "now indicate the progressive condensation of our species as a last general concurrent element in regulating the effective speed of the social movement. We can first easily recognize that this influence contributes a great deal, especially in origin, in determining a more special division of human labor, necessarily incompatible with a small number of co-operators. *Besides, by a most intimate and little known property, although still most important, such a condensation stimulates directly, in a very powerful manner, the most rapid development of social evolution, either in driving individuals to new efforts to assure themselves by more refined means of an existence which otherwise would become more difficult, or by obliging society with more stubborn and better concentrated energy to fight more stiffly against the more powerful effort of particular divergences. With one and the other, we see that it is not a question here of the absolute increase of the number of individuals, but especially of their more intense concurrence in a given space.*" *Cours*, IV, p. 455.



multitude of causes which can make individual nature deviate from its normal direction and create a pathological state. Because this organization is more supple, it is also more delicate and more accessible to change. Doubtless, we are not, from birth, predestined to some special position; but we do have tastes and aptitudes which limit our choice. If no care is taken of them, if they are ceaselessly disturbed by our daily occupations, we shall suffer and seek a way of putting an end to our suffering. But there is no other way out than to change the established order and to set up a new one. For the division of labor to produce solidarity, it is not sufficient, then, that each have his task; it is still necessary that this task be fitting to him. Now, it is this condition which is not realized in the case we are examining. In effect, if the institution of classes or castes sometimes gives rise to anxiety and pain instead of producing solidarity, this is because the distribution of social functions on which it rests does not respond, or rather no longer responds, to the distribution of natural talents. . . .

## CONCLUSION

But not only does the division of labor present the character by which we have defined morality; it more and more tends to become the essential condition of social solidarity. As we advance in the evolutionary scale, the ties which bind the individual to his family, to his native soil, to traditions which the past has given to him, to collective group usages, become loose. More mobile, he changes his environment more easily, leaves his people to go elsewhere to live a more autonomous existence, to a greater extent forms his own ideas and sentiments. Of course, the whole common conscience does not, on this account, pass out of existence. At least there will always remain this cult of personality, of

individual dignity of which we have just been speaking, and which, today, is the rallying-point of so many people. But how little a thing it is when one contemplates the ever increasing extent of social life, and, consequently, of individual consciences! For, as they become more voluminous, as intelligence becomes richer, activity more varied, in order for morality to remain constant, that is to say, in order for the individual to remain attached to the group with a force equal to that of yesterday, the ties which bind him to it must become stronger and more numerous. If, then, he formed no others than those which come from resemblances, the effacement of the segmental type would be accompanied by a systematic debasement of morality. Man would no longer be sufficiently obligated; he would no longer feel about and above him this salutary pressure of society which moderates his egoism and makes him a moral being. This is what gives moral value to the division of labor. Through it, the individual becomes cognizant of his dependence upon society; from it come the forces which keep him in check and restrain him. In short, since the division of labor becomes the chief source of social solidarity, it becomes, at the same time, the foundation of the moral order.

We can then say that, in higher societies, our duty is not to spread our activity over a large surface, but to concentrate and specialize it. We must contract our horizon, choose a definite task and immerse ourselves in it completely, instead of trying to make ourselves a sort of creative masterpiece, quite complete, which contains its worth in itself and not in the services that it renders. Finally, this specialization ought to be pushed as far as the elevation of the social type, without assigning any other limit to it.<sup>vii</sup> No doubt, we ought so to work as to realize in ourselves the collective type as it exists. There are common sentiments, common ideas, without which, as has

<sup>vii</sup>There is, however, probably another limit which we do not have to speak of since it concerns individual hygiene. It may be held that, in the light of our organico-psychic constitution, the division of labor cannot go beyond a certain limit without disorders resulting. Without entering upon the question, let us straightaway say that the extreme specialization at which biological functions have arrived does not seem favorable to this hypothesis. Moreover, in the very order of psychic and social functions, has not the division of labor, in its historical development, been carried to the last stage in the relations of men and women? Have not there been faculties completely lost by both? Why cannot the same phenomenon occur between individuals of the same sex? Of course, it takes time for the organism to adapt itself to these changes, but we do not see why a day should come when this adaptation would become impossible.

been said, one is not a man. The rule which orders us to specialize remains limited by the contrary rule. Our conclusion is not that it is good to press specialization as far as possible, but as far as necessary. As for the part that is to be played by these two opposing necessities, that is determined by experience and cannot be calculated *a priori*. It is enough for us to have shown that the second is not of a different nature from the first, but that it also is moral, and that, moreover, this duty becomes ever more important and pressing, because the general qualities which are in question suffice less and less to socialize the individual. . . .

Let us first of all remark that it is difficult to see why it would be more in keeping with the logic of human nature to develop superficially rather than profoundly. Why would a more extensive activity, but more dispersed, be superior to a more concentrated, but circumscribed, activity? Why would there be more dignity in being complete and mediocre, rather than in living a more specialized, but more intense life, particularly if it is thus possible for us to find what we have lost in this specialization, through our association with other beings who have what we lack and who complete us? We take off from the principle that man ought to realize his nature as man, to accomplish his *δικεῖλον ἔργον*, as Aristotle said. But this nature does not remain constant throughout history; it is modified with societies. Among lower peoples, the proper duty of man is to resemble his companions, to realize in himself all the traits of the collective type which are then confounded, much more than today, with the human type. But, in more advanced societies, his nature is, in large part, to be an organ of society, and his proper duty, consequently, is to play his role as an organ.

Moreover, far from being trammelled by the progress of specialization, individual personality develops with the division of labor.

To be a person is to be an autonomous source of action. Man acquires this quality only in so far as there is something in him which is his alone and which individualizes him, as he is something more than a simple incarnation of the generic type of his race and his group. It will be said that he is endowed with free will and that is enough to establish his personality. But although there may be some of this liberty in him, an object of so many discussions, it is not this metaphysical, impersonal, invariable attribute which can serve as the unique basis for concrete personality, which is empirical and variable with individuals. That could not be constituted by the wholly abstract power of choice between two opposites, but it is still necessary for this faculty to be exercised towards ends and aims which are proper to the agent. In other words, the very materials of conscience must have a personal character. But we have seen in the second book of this work that this result is progressively produced as the division of labor progresses. The effacement of the segmental type, at the same time that it necessitates a very great specialization, partially lifts the individual conscience from the organic environment which supports it, as from the social environment which envelops it, and, accordingly, because of this double emancipation, the individual becomes more of an independent factor in his own conduct. The division of labor itself contributes to this enfranchisement, for individual natures, while specializing, become more complex, and by that are in part freed from collective action and hereditary influences which can only enforce themselves upon simple, general things. . . .



## Introduction to *The Rules of Sociological Method*

In *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Durkheim 1895/1966:xiii), Durkheim makes at least three essential points. Durkheim insists, (1) sociology is a distinct field of study, and (2) although the social sciences are distinct from the natural sciences, the methods of the latter can be applied to the former. In addition, Durkheim maintains, (3) the social field is also distinct from the psychological realm. Thus, sociology is the study of social phenomena or “social facts,” a very different enterprise from the study of an individual’s own ideas or will.

Specifically, Durkheim maintains there are two different ways that social facts can be identified. First, social facts are “general throughout the extent of a given society” at a given stage in the evolution of that society (Durkheim 1895/1966:xv,13). Second, albeit related, a social fact is marked by “any manner of action . . . capable of exercising over the individual exterior constraint” (ibid.). In other words, a “social fact” is recognized by the “coercive power which it exercises or is capable of exercising over individuals” (ibid.:10). This does not mean that there are no “exceptions” to a social fact, but that it is potentially universal in the sense that, given specific conditions, it will be likely to emerge (ibid.:xv).

The “coercive power” of social facts brings us to a critical issue raised in *The Rules of Sociological Method*: crime. Durkheim argues that crime is inevitable or “normal” in all societies because crime defines the moral boundaries of a society and, in doing so, communicates to its inhabitants the range of acceptable behaviors. For Durkheim, crime is “normal”—*not* because there will always be “bad” or “wicked” individuals in society (i.e., not for idiosyncratic, psychological reasons, though those may well exist too), but because crime is “indispensable to the normal evolution of morality and law” (Durkheim 1895/1966:69). As he maintains, “A society exempt from [crime] is utterly impossible” because crime affirms and reaffirms the collective sentiments on which it is founded and which are necessary for its existence (ibid.:67). The formation and reformation of the collective conscience is never complete. Indeed, Durkheim maintains that even in a hypothetical “society of saints,” a “perfect cloister of exemplary individuals,” “faults” will appear, which will cause the same “scandal that the ordinary offense does in ordinary consciousnesses” (ibid.:68,69). It is impossible for all to be alike . . . there cannot be a society in which the individuals do not differ more or less from the collective type” (ibid.:69,70). Simply put, you cannot have a society without “crime” for the same reason that you cannot have a game without rules (i.e., you can do A, but not B) and consequences to rule violations (if you do B, this will happen). Thus, when children make up a new game, they make up not only rules, but also *consequences* for rule infractions (e.g., you have to kick the ball between the tree and the mailbox; if the ball touches your hands, you’re out). So too, one could argue, society is like a game. There are rules (norms and laws), and there are consequences or punishments if you break those norms/rules/laws (whether social ostracism or jail). Most importantly, it is the consequences of the action (crime and punishment) themselves that help clarify and reaffirm *what* the rules of the game *are* and thus the basis of society itself.

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## From *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895)

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Émile Durkheim

### WHAT IS A SOCIAL FACT?

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Before inquiring into the method suited to the study of social facts, it is important to know which facts are commonly called “social.” This information is all the more necessary since the designation “social” is used with little precision. It is currently employed for practically all

phenomena generally diffused within society, however small their social interest. But on that basis, there are, as it were, no human events that may not be called social. Each individual drinks, sleeps, eats, reasons; and it is to society’s interest that these functions be exercised in an orderly manner. If, then, all these facts are counted as “social” facts, sociology would have no subject

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matter exclusively its own, and its domain would be confused with that of biology and psychology.

But in reality there is in every society a certain group of phenomena which may be differentiated from those studied by the other natural sciences. When I fulfill my obligations as brother, husband, or citizen, when I execute my contracts, I perform duties which are defined, externally to myself and my acts, in law and in custom. Even if they conform to my own sentiments and I feel their reality subjectively, such reality is still objective, for I did not create them; I merely inherited them through my education. How many times it happens, moreover, that we are ignorant of the details of the obligations incumbent upon us, and that in order to acquaint ourselves with them we must consult the law and its authorized interpreters! Similarly, the church-member finds the beliefs and practices of his religious life ready-made at birth; their existence prior to his own implies their existence outside of himself. The system of signs I use to express my thought, the system of currency I employ to pay my debts, the instruments of credit I utilize in my commercial relations, the practices followed in my profession, etc., function independently of my own use of them. And these statements can be repeated for each member of society. Here, then, are ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that present the noteworthy property of existing outside the individual consciousness.

These types of conduct or thought are not only external to the individual but are, moreover, endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will. Of course, when I fully consent and conform to them, this constraint is felt only slightly, if at all, and is therefore unnecessary. But it is, nonetheless, an intrinsic characteristic of these facts, the proof thereof being that it asserts itself as soon as I attempt to resist it. If I attempt to violate the law, it reacts against me so as to prevent my act before its accomplishment, or to nullify my violation by restoring the damage, if it is accomplished and repairable, or to make me expiate it if it cannot be compensated for otherwise.

In the case of purely moral maxims; the public conscience exercises a check on every act which offends it by means of the surveillance it

exercises over the conduct of citizens, and the appropriate penalties at its disposal. In many cases the constraint is less violent, but nevertheless it always exists. If I do not submit to the conventions of society, if in my dress I do not conform to the customs observed in my country and in my class, the ridicule I provoke, the social isolation in which I am kept, produce, although in an attenuated form, the same effects as a punishment in the strict sense of the word. The constraint is nonetheless efficacious for being indirect. I am not obliged to speak French with my fellow-countrymen nor to use the legal currency, but I cannot possibly do otherwise. If I tried to escape this necessity, my attempt would fail miserably. As an industrialist, I am free to apply the technical methods of former centuries; but by doing so, I should invite certain ruin. Even when I free myself from these rules and violate them successfully, I am always compelled to struggle with them. When finally overcome, they make their constraining power sufficiently felt by the resistance they offer. The enterprises of all innovators, including successful ones, come up against resistance of this kind.

Here, then, is a category of facts with very distinctive characteristics: it consists of ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him. These ways of thinking could not be confused with biological phenomena, since they consist of representations and of actions; nor with psychological phenomena, which exist only in the individual consciousness and through it. They constitute, thus, a new variety of phenomena; and it is to them exclusively that the term "social" ought to be applied. And this term fits them quite well, for it is clear that, since their source is not in the individual, their substratum can be no other than society, either the political society as a whole or some one of the partial groups it includes, such as religious denominations, political, literary, and occupational associations, etc. On the other hand, this term "social" applies to them exclusively, for it has a distinct meaning only if it designates exclusively the phenomena which are not included in any of the categories of facts that have already been established and classified. These ways of thinking and acting therefore constitute the proper domain of

sociology. It is true that, when we define them with this word “constraint,” we risk shocking the zealous partisans of absolute individualism. For those who profess the complete autonomy of the individual, man’s dignity is diminished whenever he is made to feel that he is not completely self-determinant. It is generally accepted today, however, that most of our ideas and our tendencies are not developed by ourselves but come to us from without. How can they become a part of us except by imposing themselves upon us? This is the whole meaning of our definition. And it is generally accepted, moreover, that social constraint is not necessarily incompatible with the individual personality.<sup>1</sup>

Since the examples that we have just cited (legal and moral regulations, religious faiths, financial systems, etc.) all consist of established beliefs and practices, one might be led to believe that social facts exist only where there is some social organization. But there are other facts without such crystallized form which have the same objectivity and the same ascendancy over the individual. These are called “social currents.” Thus the great movements of enthusiasm, indignation, and pity in a crowd do not originate in any one of the particular individual consciousnesses. They come to each one of us from without and can carry us away in spite of ourselves. Of course, it may happen that, in abandoning myself to them unreservedly, I do not feel the pressure they exert upon me. But it is revealed as soon as I try to resist them. Let an individual attempt to oppose one of these collective manifestations, and the emotions that he denies will turn against him. Now, if this power of external coercion asserts itself so clearly in cases of resistance, it must exist also in the first-mentioned cases, although we are unconscious of it. We are then victims of the illusion of having ourselves created that which actually forced itself from without. If the complacency with which we permit ourselves to be carried along conceals the pressure undergone, nevertheless it does not abolish it. Thus, air is no less heavy because we do not detect its weight. So, even if we ourselves have spontaneously contributed to the production of the common emotion, the impression we have received differs markedly from that which we would have experienced if we had been alone. Also, once the crowd has dispersed, that is, once

these social influences have ceased to act upon us and we are alone again, the emotions which have passed through the mind appear strange to us, and we no longer recognize them as ours. We realize that these feelings have been impressed upon us to a much greater extent than they were created by us. It may even happen that they horrify us, so much were they contrary to our nature. Thus, a group of individuals, most of whom are perfectly inoffensive, may, when gathered in a crowd, be drawn into acts of atrocity. And what we say of these transitory outbursts applies similarly to those more permanent currents of opinion on religious, political, literary, or artistic matters which are constantly being formed around us, whether in society as a whole or in more limited circles.

To confirm this definition of the social fact by a characteristic illustration from common experience, one need only observe the manner in which children are brought up. Considering the facts as they are and as they have always been, it becomes immediately evident that all education is a continuous effort to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling, and acting which he could not have arrived at spontaneously. From the very first hours of his life, we compel him to eat, drink, and sleep at regular hours; we constrain him to cleanliness, calmness, and obedience; later we exert pressure upon him in order that he may learn proper consideration for others, respect for customs and conventions, the need for work, etc. If, in time, this constraint ceases to be felt, it is because it gradually gives rise to habits and to internal tendencies that render constraint unnecessary; but nevertheless it is not abolished, for it is still the source from which these habits were derived. It is true that, according to Spencer, a rational education ought to reject such methods, allowing the child to act in complete liberty; but as this pedagogic theory has never been applied by any known people, it must be accepted only as an expression of personal opinion, not as a fact which can contradict the aforementioned observations. What makes these facts particularly instructive is that the aim of education is, precisely, the socialization of the human being; the process of education, therefore, gives us in a nutshell the historical fashion in which the social being is constituted. This unremitting pressure to which the child is subjected is the very pressure of the

<sup>1</sup>We do not intend to imply, however, that all constraints are normal. We shall return to this point later.

social milieu which tends to fashion him in its own image, and of which parents and teachers are merely the representatives and intermediaries.

It follows that sociological phenomena cannot be defined by their universality. A thought which we find in every individual consciousness, a movement repeated by all individuals, is not thereby a social fact. If sociologists have been satisfied with defining them by this characteristic, it is because they confused them with what one might call their reincarnation in the individual. It is, however, the collective aspects of the beliefs, tendencies, and practices of a group that characterize truly social phenomena. As for the forms that the collective states assume when refracted in the individual, these are things of another sort. This duality is clearly demonstrated by the fact that these two orders of phenomena are frequently found dissociated from one another. Indeed, certain of these social manners of acting and thinking acquire, by reason of their repetition, a certain rigidity which on its own account crystallizes them, so to speak, and isolates them from the particular events which reflect them. They thus acquire a body, a tangible form, and constitute a reality in their own right, quite distinct from the individual facts which produce it. Collective habits are inherent not only in the successive acts which they determine but, by a privilege of which we find no example in the biological realm, they are given permanent expression in a formula which is repeated from mouth to mouth, transmitted by education, and fixed even in writing. Such is the origin and nature of legal and moral rules, popular aphorisms and proverbs, articles of faith wherein religious or political groups condense their beliefs, standards of taste established by literary schools, etc. None of these can be found entirely reproduced in the applications made of them by individuals, since they can exist even without being actually applied.

No doubt, this dissociation does not always manifest itself with equal distinctness, but its obvious existence in the important and numerous cases just cited is sufficient to prove that the social fact is a thing distinct from its individual manifestations. Moreover, even when this dissociation is not immediately apparent, it may often be disclosed by certain devices of method. Such dissociation is indispensable if one wishes to separate social facts from their alloys in order to

observe them in a state of purity. Currents of opinion, with an intensity varying according to the time and place, impel certain groups either to more marriages, for example, or to more suicides, or to a higher or lower birthrate, etc. These currents are plainly social facts. At first sight they seem inseparable from the forms they take in individual cases. But statistics furnish us with the means of isolating them. They are, in fact, represented with considerable exactness by the rates of births, marriages, and suicides, that is, by the number obtained by dividing the average annual total of marriages, births, suicides, by the number of persons whose ages lie within the range in which marriages, births, and suicides occur.<sup>ii</sup> Since each of these figures contains all the individual cases indiscriminately, the individual circumstances which may have had a share in the production of the phenomenon are neutralized and, consequently, do not contribute to its determination. The average, then, expresses a certain state of the group mind (*l'âme collective*).

Such are social phenomena, when disentangled from all foreign matter. As for their individual manifestations, these are indeed, to a certain extent, social, since they partly reproduce a social model. Each of them also depends, and to a large extent, on the organopsychological constitution of the individual and on the particular circumstances in which he is placed. Thus they are not sociological phenomena in the strict sense of the word. They belong to two realms at once; one could call them sociopsychological. They interest the sociologist without constituting the immediate subject matter of sociology. There exist in the interior of organisms similar phenomena, compound in their nature, which form in their turn the subject matter of the "hybrid sciences," such as physiological chemistry, for example.

The objection may be raised that a phenomenon is collective only if it is common to all members of society, or at least to most of them—in other words, if it is truly general. This may be true; but it is general because it is collective (that is, more or less obligatory), and certainly not collective because general. It is a group condition repeated in the individual because imposed on him. It is to be found in each part because it exists in the whole, rather than in the whole because it exists in the parts. This becomes conspicuously evident in those beliefs and practices which are transmitted to us

<sup>ii</sup>Suicides do not occur at every age, and they take place with varying intensity at the different ages in which they occur.

ready-made by previous generations; we receive and adopt them because, being both collective and ancient, they are invested with a particular authority that education has taught us to recognize and respect. It is, of course, true that a vast portion of our social culture is transmitted to us in this way; but even when the social fact is due in part to our direct collaboration, its nature is not different. A collective emotion which bursts forth suddenly and violently in a crowd does not express merely what all the individual sentiments had in common; it is something entirely different, as we have shown. It results from their being together, a product of the actions and reactions which take place between individual consciousnesses; and if each individual consciousness echoes the collective sentiment, it is by virtue of the special energy resident in its collective origin. If all hearts beat in unison, this is not the result of a spontaneous and pre-established harmony but rather because an identical force propels them in the same direction. Each is carried along by all.

We thus arrive at the point where we can formulate and delimit in a precise way the domain of sociology. It comprises only a limited group of phenomena. A social fact is to be recognized by the power of external coercion which it exercises or is capable of exercising over individuals, and the presence of this power may be recognized in its turn either by the existence of some specific sanction or by the resistance offered against every individual effort that tends to violate it. One can, however, define it also by its diffusion within the group, provided that, in conformity with our previous remarks, one takes care to add as a second and essential characteristic that its own existence is independent of the individual forms it assumes in its diffusion. This last criterion is perhaps, in certain cases, easier to apply than the preceding one. In fact, the constraint is easy to ascertain when it expresses itself externally by some direct reaction of society, as is the case in law, morals, beliefs, customs, and even fashions. But when it is only indirect, like the constraint which an economic organization exercises, it cannot always be so easily detected. Generality combined with externality may, then, be easier to establish. Moreover, this second definition is but another form of the first; for if a mode of behavior whose existence is external to individual consciousnesses becomes general, this can only be brought about by its being imposed upon them.

But these several phenomena present the same characteristic by which we defined the others. These “ways of existing” are imposed on the individual precisely in the same fashion as the “ways of acting” of which we have spoken. Indeed, when we wish to know how a society is divided politically, of what these divisions themselves are composed, and how complete is the fusion existing between them, we shall not achieve our purpose by physical inspection and by geographical observations; for these phenomena are social, even when they have some basis in physical nature. It is only by a study of public law that a comprehension of this organization is possible, for it is this law that determines the organization, as it equally determines our domestic and civil relations. This political organization is, then, no less obligatory than the social facts mentioned above. If the population crowds into our cities instead of scattering into the country, this is due to a trend of public opinion, a collective drive that imposes this concentration upon the individuals. We can no more choose the style of our houses than of our clothing—at least, both are equally obligatory. The channels of communication prescribe the direction of internal migrations and commerce, etc., and even their extent. Consequently, at the very most, it should be necessary to add to the list of phenomena which we have enumerated as presenting the distinctive criterion of a social fact only one additional category, “ways of existing”; and, as this enumeration was not meant to be rigorously exhaustive, the addition would not be absolutely necessary.

Such an addition is perhaps not necessary, for these “ways of existing” are only crystallized “ways of acting.” The political structure of a society is merely the way in which its component segments have become accustomed to live with one another. If their relations are traditionally intimate, the segments tend to fuse with one another, or, in the contrary case, to retain their identity. The type of habitation imposed upon us is merely the way in which our contemporaries and our ancestors have been accustomed to construct their houses. The methods of communication are merely the channels which the regular currents of commerce and migrations have dug, by flowing in the same direction. To be sure, if the phenomena of a structural character alone presented this performance, one might believe that they constituted a distinct species. A legal regulation is an arrangement no less permanent

than a type of architecture, and yet the regulation is a “physiological” fact. A simple moral maxim is assuredly somewhat more malleable, but it is much more rigid than a simple professional custom or a fashion. There is thus a whole series of degrees without a break in continuity between the facts of the most articulated structure and those free currents of social life which are not yet definitely molded. The differences between them are, therefore, only differences in the degree of consolidation they present. Both are simply life, more or less crystallized. No doubt, it may be of some advantage to reserve the term “morphological” for those social facts which concern the social substratum, but only on condition of not overlooking the fact that they are of the same nature as the others. Our definition will then include the whole relevant range of facts if we say: *A social fact is every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations. . . .*<sup>iii</sup>

#### THE NORMAL AND THE PATHOLOGICAL

If there is any fact whose pathological character appears incontestable, that fact is crime. All criminologists are agreed on this point. Although they explain this pathology differently, they are unanimous in recognizing it. But let us see if this problem does not demand a more extended consideration. . . .

Crime is present not only in the majority of societies of one particular species but in all societies of all types. There is no society that is not confronted with the problem of criminality. Its form changes; the acts thus characterized are not the same everywhere; but, everywhere and always, there have been men who have behaved in such a way as to draw upon themselves penal repression.

If, in proportion as societies pass from the lower to the higher types, the rate of criminality, i.e., the relation between the yearly number of crimes and the population, tended to decline, it might be believed that crime, while still normal, is tending to lose this character of normality. But we have no reason to believe that such a regression is substantiated. Many facts would seem rather to indicate a movement in the opposite direction. From the beginning of the [nineteenth] century, statistics enable us to follow the course of criminality. It has everywhere increased. In France the increase is nearly 300 per cent. There is, then, no phenomenon that presents more indisputably all the symptoms of normality, since it appears closely connected with the conditions of all collective life. To make of crime a form of social morbidity would be to admit that morbidity is not something accidental, but, on the contrary, that in certain cases it grows out of the fundamental constitution of the living organism; it would result in wiping out all distinction between the physiological and the pathological. No doubt it is possible that crime itself will have abnormal forms, as, for example, when its rate is unusually high. This excess is, indeed, undoubtedly morbid in nature. What is normal, simply, is the existence of criminality, provided that it attains and does not exceed, for each social type, a certain level, which it is perhaps not impossible to fix in conformity with the preceding rules.<sup>iv</sup>

Here we are, then, in the presence of a conclusion in appearance quite paradoxical. Let us make no mistake. To classify crime among the phenomena of normal sociology is not to say merely that it is an inevitable, although regrettable phenomenon, due to the incorrigible wickedness of men; it is to affirm that it is a factor in public health, an integral part of all healthy societies. This result is, at first glance, surprising enough to have puzzled even ourselves for a long time. Once this first surprise has been overcome, however, it is not difficult to find reasons explaining this normality and at the same time confirming it.

<sup>iii</sup>This close connection between life and structure, organ and function, may be easily proved in sociology because between these two extreme terms there exists a whole series of immediately observable intermediate stages which show the bond between them. Biology is not in the same favorable position. But we may well believe that the inductions on this subject made by sociology are applicable to biology and that, in organisms as well as in societies, only differences in degree exist between these two orders of facts.

<sup>iv</sup>From the fact that crime is a phenomenon of normal sociology, it does not follow that the criminal is an individual normally constituted from the biological and psychological points of view. The two questions are independent of each other. This independence will be better understood when we have shown, later on, the difference between psychological and sociological facts.



In the first place crime is normal because a society exempt from it is utterly impossible. Crime, we have shown elsewhere, consists of an act that offends certain very strong collective sentiments. In a society in which criminal acts are no longer committed, the sentiments they offend would have to be found without exception in all individual consciousnesses, and they must be found to exist with the same degree as sentiments contrary to them. Assuming that this condition could actually be realized, crime would not thereby disappear; it would only change its form, for the very cause which would thus dry up the sources of criminality would immediately open up new ones.

Indeed, for the collective sentiments which are protected by the penal law of a people at a specified moment of its history to take possession of the public conscience or for them to acquire a stronger hold where they have an insufficient grip, they must acquire an intensity greater than that which they had hitherto had. The community as a whole must experience them more vividly, for it can acquire from no other source the greater force necessary to control these individuals who formerly were the most refractory. . . .

Imagine a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals. Crimes, properly so called, will there be unknown; but faults which appear venial to the layman will create there the same scandal that the ordinary offense does in ordinary consciousnesses. If, then, this society has the power to judge and punish, it will define these acts as criminal and will treat them as such. For the same reason, the perfect and upright man judges his smallest failings with a severity that the majority reserve for acts more truly in the nature of an offense. Formerly, acts of violence against persons were more frequent than they are today, because respect for individual dignity was less strong. As this has increased, these crimes have become more rare; and also, many acts violating this sentiment have been introduced into the penal law which were not included there in primitive times.<sup>v</sup>

In order to exhaust all the hypotheses logically possible, it will perhaps be asked why this unanimity does not extend to all collective sentiments without exception. Why should not even the most feeble sentiment gather enough energy to prevent all dissent? The moral consciousness of the society would be present in its entirety in all the

individuals, which a vitality sufficient to prevent all acts offending it—the purely conventional faults as well as the crimes. But a uniformity so universal and absolute is utterly impossible; for the immediate physical milieu in which each one of us is placed, the hereditary antecedents, and the social influences vary from one individual to the next, and consequently diversify consciousnesses. It is impossible for all to be alike, if only because each one has his own organism and that these organisms occupy different areas in space. That is why, even among the lower peoples, where individual originality is very little developed, it nevertheless does exist.

Thus, since there cannot be a society in which the individuals do not differ more or less from the collective type, it is also inevitable that, among these divergences, there are some with a criminal character. What confers this character upon them is not the intrinsic quality of a given act but that definition which the collective conscience lends them. If the collective conscience is stronger, if it has enough authority practically to suppress these divergences, it will also be more sensitive, more exacting; and, reacting against the slightest deviations with the energy it otherwise displays only against more considerable infractions, it will attribute to them the same gravity as formerly to crimes. In other words, it will designate them as criminal.

Crime is, then, necessary; it is bound up with the fundamental conditions of all social life, and by that very fact it is useful, because these conditions of which it is a part are themselves indispensable to the normal evolution of morality and law.

Indeed, it is no longer possible today to dispute the fact that law and morality vary from one social type to the next, nor that they change within the same type if the conditions of life are modified. But, in order that these transformations may be possible, the collective sentiments at the basis of morality must not be hostile to change, and consequently must have but moderate energy. If they were too strong, they would no longer be plastic. Every pattern is an obstacle to new patterns, to the extent that the first pattern is inflexible. The better a structure is articulated, the more it offers a healthy resistance to all modification; and this is equally true of

<sup>v</sup>Calumny, insults, slander, fraud, etc.

functional, as of anatomical, organization. If there were no crimes, this condition could not have been fulfilled; for such a hypothesis presupposes that collective sentiments have arrived at a degree of intensity unexampled in history. Nothing is good indefinitely and to an unlimited extent. The authority which the moral conscience enjoys must not be excessive; otherwise no one would dare criticize it, and it would too easily congeal into an immutable form. To make progress, individual originality must be able to express itself. In order that the originality of the idealist whose dreams transcend his century may find expression, it is necessary that the originality of the criminal, who is below the level of his time, shall also be possible. One does not occur without the other.

Nor is this all. Aside from this indirect utility, it happens that crime itself plays a useful role in this evolution. Crime implies not only that the way remains open to necessary changes but that in certain cases it directly prepares these changes. Where crime exists, collective sentiments are sufficiently flexible to take on a new form, and crime sometimes helps to determine the form they will take. How many times, indeed, it is only an anticipation of future morality—a step toward what will be! According to Athenian law, Socrates was a criminal, and his condemnation

was no more than just. However, his crime, namely, the independence of his thought, rendered a service not only to humanity but to his country. It served to prepare a new morality and faith which the Athenians needed, since the traditions by which they had lived until then were no longer in harmony with the current conditions of life. Nor is the case of Socrates unique; it is reproduced periodically in history. It would never have been possible to establish the freedom of thought we now enjoy if the regulations prohibiting it had not been violated before being solemnly abrogated. At that time, however, the violation was a crime, since it was an offense against sentiments still very keen in the average conscience. And yet this crime was useful as a prelude to reforms which daily became more necessary. Liberal philosophy had as its precursors the heretics of all kinds who were justly punished by secular authorities during the entire course of the Middle Ages and until the eve of modern times.

From this point of view the fundamental facts of criminality present themselves to us in an entirely new light. Contrary to current ideas, the criminal no longer seems a totally unsociable being, a sort of parasitic element, a strange and inassimilable body, introduced into the midst of society.<sup>vi</sup> On the contrary, he plays a definite role in social life. . . .

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## Introduction to *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*

*Suicide* (1897) is both a theoretical and methodological exemplar. In this famous study, Durkheim examines a phenomenon that most people think of as an intensely individual act—suicide—and demonstrates its *social* (rather than psychological) roots. His method for doing this is to analyze *rates* of suicide between societies and historical periods and between different social groups within the same society. By linking the different suicide rates of particular societies and social groups to the specific characteristics of that society or social group, Durkheim not only demonstrates that individual pathologies are rooted in *social* conditions, but, in addition, shows how sociologists can scientifically study social behavior. His innovative examination of suicide rates lent credibility to his conviction that sociology should be considered a viable scientific discipline.

Most importantly, Durkheim argues that the places with the highest rates of alcoholism and mental illness are not the areas with the highest suicide rates (thereby undermining the notion that it is pathological psychological states that are solely determinative of the individual act of suicide). Rather, Durkheim maintains that suicide rates are highest in moments when and in places where individuals lack social and moral regulation or integration. In addition, as in his first book, *The Division of Labor in Society*, in *Suicide* Durkheim was particularly interested in delineating the fundamental differences

<sup>vi</sup>We have ourselves committed the error of speaking thus of the criminal, because of a failure to apply our rule (*Division du travail social*, pp. 395–96).

between traditional and modern societies. Durkheim sought to explain why suicide is rare in small, simple societies while much more frequent in modern, industrial ones. Parallel to his argument in *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim argues that traditional and modern societies differ not only in their rates of suicide, but in the *types* of suicide that are prevalent as well.

Specifically, Durkheim saw two main characteristics of modern, industrial society: (1) a lack of integration of the individual in the social group and (2) a lack of moral regulation. Durkheim used the term *egoism* to refer to the lack of integration of the individual in the social group. He used the term *anomie* to refer to a lack of moral regulation. Durkheim argued that both of these conditions—egoism and anomie—are “chronic” in modern, industrial society; and that in extreme, pathological form, both egoism and anomie can result in suicide. Let’s look at these two different, albeit intimately interrelated, conditions in turn.

For Durkheim, egoistic suicide results from a pathological weakening of the bonds between the individual and the social group. This lack of integration is evident statistically, in that there are higher rates of suicide among single, divorced, and widowed persons than among married persons, and that there are higher rates of suicide among married persons without children than there are among married persons with children. Additionally, Durkheim argued that egoism helps explain why suicide rates are higher among Protestants than among Catholics or Jews: Protestantism emphasizes an *individual* relationship with God, which means that the individual is less bound to the religious clergy and members of the congregation. Interestingly, then, Durkheim maintains that it is not Catholic doctrine that inhibits the act of suicide; rather, it is Catholics’ *social bonds*, their association with the priests, nuns, and other lay members of the congregation, that deters them from this act. Protestant rates of suicide are higher because Protestants are more socially and spiritually isolated than the more communally oriented Jews and Catholics.

Durkheim saw an increase in egoistic suicide as a “natural” outgrowth of the individuation of modern, industrial societies. For instance, today it is quite common—especially in big cities—for people to live alone. By contrast, in many traditional societies it is virtually unheard of for anyone to live alone. Children live with parents until they get married; parents move in with children (or vice versa) if a spouse dies; unmarried siblings live with either parents or other siblings. As we noted above, Durkheim argued that in its extreme form the type of social isolation found in modern societies can be—literally—fatal.

Intertwined with an increasing lack of social integration in modern, industrial societies is a lack of moral integration. Durkheim used the term *anomie* to refer to this lack of moral regulation. Anomic suicide is the pathological result of a lack of moral direction, when one feels morally adrift. Durkheim viewed modern societies as “chronically” anomic, or characterized by a lack of regulation of the individual by the collective.

Thus, for instance, modern industrial societies are religiously pluralistic, whereby people are more able to freely choose among a variety of religious faiths—or to choose not to “believe” at all. Similarly, today many people choose to “identify”—or not—with a specific part of their ethnic heritage. That we spend much time and energy searching for “identity”—“I’m a punk!” “I’m Irish!”—reflects a lack of moral regulation. To be sure, there are many wonderful benefits from this increasing individuation, which contrasts significantly from small, traditional, homogeneous societies in which “who” you are is taken for granted. In small, closed, indigenous societies without so many (or any) options, where there is one religion and one ethnic group, your place in that society is a cultural given—a “place” that may be quite oppressive. Not surprisingly, then, Durkheim asserts that suppressing individuation also can produce pathological consequences. (This point will be discussed further below.)

The lack of moral regulation in modern societies is especially prevalent in times of intense social and personal change. During such periods, the authority of the family, the church, and the community may be challenged or questioned; without moral guidance and authority,

individuals may feel like they have no moral anchor. The pursuit of individual desires and goals can overtake moral concerns. However, Durkheim maintains that anomie can result not only from “bad” social change, such as losing one’s job or a political crisis, but from “positive” social change as well. Consider, for instance, what happens when someone wins the lottery. Most people think that if they were to win the lottery, they would experience only happiness. Indeed, some people buy lottery tickets thinking, “If I win the ‘big one,’ all my problems will be solved!” However, Durkheim contends that sudden life-changing events can bring on a battery of social and personal issues that one might not expect.

First, after winning the lottery, you might suddenly find yourself confronted with weighty existential issues. Before the lottery, you may have simply worked—and worked hard—because you needed to earn a living. But now that you’ve won the lottery, you don’t know what to do. By not having to work, you might start thinking about things, such as the meaning of life, that you had never thought about before. This feeling that you don’t know “what to do” and “how to act” is a state of anomie.

In addition, you might start to wonder how much friends and family should get from your winnings. You might begin to feel like everyone just wants your money and that it is hard to tell who likes *you* and who just likes your newfound fame and fortune. You might feel like you can’t talk to your friends about your dilemma, that no one in your previous social circle really “understands” you anymore. You may begin to find that you can’t relate to the people from your old socioeconomic class, but that you can’t relate to anyone in your new class either. Thus, the sudden change brought about by winning the lottery can lead not only to feeling morally “anchorless” (anomie), but also to feeling socially alone (egoism). A most extreme outcome of feeling this moral and social isolation would be suicide.

As we noted previously, Durkheim argued that traditional and modern societies are rooted in different social conditions. Compared to modern societies, social regulation is intensive in traditional societies, thus limiting the development of individuality. In extreme form, such restrictions can lead to altruistic suicide, where an individual gives his life for



**Photo 3.2** In a modern-day incident of altruistic suicide, a number of South Vietnamese Buddhist monks used self-immolation to protest the persecution of the country’s majority Buddhist population at the hands of the Catholic president, Ngô Đình Diệm. Here, Thích Quảng Đức burns himself to death on a Saigon street, June 11, 1963.

the social group. According to Durkheim, this is the primary type of suicide that occurs in small, traditional societies where individuation is minimal. The classic type of altruistic suicide was the Aztecs' practice of human sacrifice, in which a person was sacrificed for the moral or spiritual benefit of the group.<sup>1</sup>

Today many sociologists find fault with Durkheim's distinction between "modern" and "traditional" societies. This binary opposition seems to be a function of the Eurocentrism of his day: social scientists tended to imagine that their societies were extremely "complex," while "traditional" societies were just "simple." Indeed, "traditional" and "modern" societies may have more in common than Durkheim let on. The degree of integration of the individual into the collective social group is a complex process rather than a permanent state. For instance, even though Durkheim saw altruistic suicide as more prevalent in "primitive" societies, sadly, it is far from absent in "modern" societies as well. Not unlike the altruistic suicides in primitive societies, modern-day wars and suicide bombings are carried out on the premise that sacrificing one's life is necessary for the fight to preserve or attain a sacred way of life for the group as a whole. Nowhere are the similarities between these expressions of altruistic suicide (soldiers, suicide bombers, and "primitive" human sacrifice) more readily apparent than in the tragic case of the Japanese kamikaze (suicide) pilots of World War II. Shockingly, kamikaze flights were a principal tactic of Japan in the last year of the war.<sup>2</sup>

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## From *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897)

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Émile Durkheim

### ANOMIC SUICIDE

### I

But society is not only something attracting the sentiments and activities of individuals with unequal force. It is also a power controlling them. There is a relation between the way this regulative action is performed and the social suicide-rate.

It is a well-known fact that economic crises have an aggravating effect on the suicidal tendency.

In Vienna, in 1873 a financial crisis occurred which reached its height in 1874; the number of suicides immediately rose. From 141 in 1872, they rose to 153 in 1873 and 216 in 1874. The increase

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<sup>1</sup>Durkheim briefly mentioned another type of suicide prevalent in "primitive" societies—"fatalistic suicide." For Durkheim, fatalistic suicide was rooted in *hopelessness*—the hopelessness of oppressed people, such as slaves, who had not the slightest chance of changing their personal situation.

<sup>2</sup>In October 1944, some 1,200 kamikaze (which translates from Japanese as "god wind") plunged to their deaths in an attack on a U.S. naval fleet in the Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. Six months later, some 1,900 kamikaze dove to their deaths in the battle of Okinawa, resulting in the death of more than 5,000 American sailors. Most of the kamikaze pilots involved were men in their teens or early 20s. They were said to have gone to their deaths "joyfully," having followed specific rituals of cleanliness, and equipped with books with uplifting thoughts to "transcend life and death" and "[b]e always pure-hearted and cheerful" (Daniel Ford, Review of *Kamikaze: Japan's Suicide Gods*, by Albert Axell and Hideaki Kase, *Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 2002).

in 1874 is 53 per cent<sup>i</sup> above 1872 and 41 per cent above 1873. What proves this catastrophe to have been the sole cause of the increase is the special prominence of the increase when the crisis was acute, or during the first four months of 1874. From January 1 to April 30 there had been 48 suicides in 1871, 44 in 1872, 43 in 1873; there were 73 in 1874. The increase is 70 per cent.<sup>ii</sup> The same crisis occurring at the same time in Frankfurt-on-Main produced the same effects there. In the years before 1874, 22 suicides were committed annually on the average; in 1874 there were 32, or 45 per cent more.

The famous crash is unforgotten which took place on the Paris Bourse during the winter of 1882. Its consequences were felt not only in Paris but throughout France. From 1874 to 1886 the average annual increase was only 2 per cent; in 1882 it was 7 per cent. Moreover, it was unequally distributed among the different times of year, occurring principally during the first three months or at the very time of the crash. Within these three months alone 59 per cent of the total rise occurred. So distinctly is the rise the result of unusual circumstances that it not only is not encountered in 1881 but has disappeared in 1883, although on the whole the latter year had a few more suicides than the preceding one:

This relation is found not only in some exceptional cases, but is the rule. The number of bankruptcies is a barometer of adequate sensitivity, reflecting the variations of economic life. When they increase abruptly from year to year, some serious disturbance has certainly occurred. From 1845 to 1869 there were sudden rises, symptomatic of crises, on three occasions. While the annual increase in the number of bankruptcies during this period is 3.2 per cent, it is 26 per cent in 1847, 37 per cent in 1854 and 20 per cent in 1861. At these three moments, there is also to be observed an unusually rapid rise in the number of suicides. While the average annual increase

during these 24 years was only 2 per cent, it was 17 per cent in 1847, 8 per cent in 1854 and 9 per cent in 1861.

But to what do these crises owe their influence? Is it because they increase poverty by causing public wealth to fluctuate? Is life more readily renounced as it becomes more difficult? The explanation is seductively simple; and it agrees with the popular idea of suicide. But it is contradicted by facts.

Actually, if voluntary deaths increased because life was becoming more difficult, they should diminish perceptibly as comfort increases. Now, although when the price of the most necessary foods rises excessively, suicides generally do the same, they are not found to fall below the average in the opposite case. In Prussia, in 1850 wheat was quoted at the lowest point it reached during the entire period of 1848–81; it was at 6.91 marks per 50 kilograms; yet at this very time suicides rose from 1,527 where they were in 1849 to 1,736, or an increase of 13 per cent, and continued to increase during the years 1851, 1852 and 1853 although the cheap market held. In 1858–59 a new fall took place; yet suicides rose from 2,038 in 1857 to 2,126 in 1858, and to 2,146 in 1859. From 1863 to 1866 prices which had reached 11.04 marks in 1861 fell progressively to 7.95 marks in 1864 and remained very reasonable for the whole period; suicides during the same time increased 17 per cent (2,112 in 1862, 2,485 in 1866).<sup>iii</sup> Similar facts are observed in Bavaria. According to a curve

	1881	1882	1883
<b>Annual total</b>	6,741	7,213 (plus 7%)	7,267
<b>First three months</b>	1,589	1,770 (plus 11%)	1,604

constructed by Mayr<sup>iv</sup> for the period 1835–61, the price of rye was lowest during the years 1857–58 and 1858–59; now suicides, which in 1857 numbered only 286, rose to 329 in 1858, to 387 in 1859. The same phenomenon had already occurred during the years 1848–50; at that time wheat had been very cheap in Bavaria as well as throughout Europe. Yet, in spite of a slight

<sup>i</sup>Durkheim incorrectly gives this figure as 51 percent.—Ed.

<sup>ii</sup>In 1874 over 1873.—Ed.

<sup>iii</sup>See Starck, *Verbrechen und Vergehen in Preussen*, Berlin, 1884, p. 55.

<sup>iv</sup>*Die Gesetzmässigkeit im Gesellschaftsleben*, p. 345.

temporary drop due to political events, which we have mentioned, suicides remained at the same level. There were 217 in 1847, there were still 215 in 1848, and if they dropped for a moment to 189 in 1849, they rose again in 1850 and reached 250.

So far is the increase in poverty from causing the increase in suicide that even fortunate crises, the effect of which is abruptly to enhance a country's prosperity, affect suicide like economic disasters.

The conquest of Rome by Victor-Emmanuel in 1870, by definitely forming the basis of Italian unity, was the starting point for the country of a process of growth which is making it one of the great powers of Europe. Trade and industry received a sharp stimulus from it and surprisingly rapid changes took place. Whereas in 1876, 4,459 steam boilers with a total of 54,000 horse-power were enough for industrial needs, the number of machines in 1887 was 9,983 and their horse-power of 167,000 was threefold more. Of course the amount of production rose proportionately during the same time.<sup>v</sup> Trade followed the same rising course; not only did the merchant marine, communications and transportation develop, but the number of persons and things transported doubled.<sup>vi</sup> As this generally heightened activity caused an increase in salaries (an increase of 35 per cent is estimated to have taken place from 1873 to 1889), the material comfort of workers rose, especially since the price of bread was falling at the same time.<sup>vii</sup> Finally, according to calculations by Bodio, private wealth rose from 45 and a half billions on the average during the period 1875–80 to 51 billions during the years 1880–85 and 54 billions and a half in 1885–90.<sup>viii</sup>

Now, an unusual increase in the number of suicides is observed parallel with this collective renaissance. From 1866 to 1870 they were

roughly stable; from 1871 to 1877 they increased 36 per cent. There were in

1864–70	29 suicides per million	1874	37 suicides per million
1871	31 suicides per million	1875	34 suicides per million
1872	33 suicides per million	1876	36.5 suicides per million
1873	36 suicides per million	1877	40.6 suicides per million

And since then the movement has continued. The total figure, 1,139 in 1877, was 1,463 in 1889, a new increase of 28 per cent.

In Prussia the same phenomenon occurred on two occasions. In 1866 the kingdom received a first enlargement. It annexed several important provinces, while becoming the head of the Confederation of the North. Immediately this growth in glory and power was accompanied by a sudden rise in the number of suicides. There had been 123 suicides per million during the period 1856–60 per average year and only 122 during the years 1861–65. In the five years, 1866–70, in spite of the drop in 1870, the average rose to 133. The year 1867, which immediately followed victory, was that in which suicide achieved the highest point it had reached since 1816 (1 suicide per 5,432 inhabitants, while in 1864 there was only one case per 8,739).

On the morrow of the war of 1870 a new accession of good fortune took place. Germany was unified and placed entirely under Prussian hegemony. An enormous war indemnity added to the public wealth; commerce and industry made great strides. The development of suicide was never so rapid. From 1875 to 1886 it increased 90 per cent, from 3,278 cases to 6,212.

World expositions, when successful, are considered favorable events in the existence of a society. They stimulate business, bring more money into the country and are thought to increase public prosperity, especially in the city where they take place. Yet, quite possibly, they ultimately take their toll in a considerably higher number of suicides. Especially does this seem

<sup>v</sup>See Fornasari di Verce, *La criminalita e le vicende economiche d'Italia*, Turin 1894, pp. 7783.

<sup>vi</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 108–117.

<sup>vii</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 86–104.

<sup>viii</sup>The increase is less during the period 1885–90 because of a financial crisis.

to have been true of the Exposition of 1878. The rise that year was the highest occurring between 1874 and 1886. It was 8 per cent, that is, higher than the one caused by the crash of 1882. And what almost proves the Exposition to have been the cause of this increase is that 86 per cent of it took place precisely during the six months of the Exposition.

In 1889 things were not identical all over France. But quite possibly the Boulanger crisis neutralized the contrary effects of the Exposition by its depressive influence on the growth of suicides. Certainly at Paris, although the political feeling aroused must have had the same effect as in the rest of the country, things happened as in 1878. For the 7 months of the Exposition, suicides increased almost 10 per cent, 9.66 to be exact, while through the remainder of the year they were below what they had been in 1888 and what they afterwards were in 1890.

It may well be that but for the Boulanger influence the rise would have been greater.

What proves still more conclusively that economic distress does not have the aggravating influence often attributed to it, is that it tends rather to produce the opposite effect. There is very little suicide in Ireland, where the peasantry leads so wretched a life. Poverty-stricken Calabria has almost no suicides; Spain has a tenth as many as France. Poverty may even be considered a protection. In the various

	1888	1889	1890
<b>The seven months of the Exposition</b>	517	567	540
<b>The five other months</b>	319	311	356

French departments the more people there are who have independent means, the more numerous are suicides. . . .

If therefore industrial or financial crises increase suicides, this is not because they cause poverty, since crises of prosperity have the same result; it is because they are crises, that is, disturbances of the collective order.<sup>ix</sup>

Departments Where Suicides Were Committed (1878-1887; per 100,000 Inhabitants)		Average Number of Persons of Independent Means per 1,000 Inhabitants in Each Group of Department (1886)
Suicides	Number of Departments	
From 48 to 43	5	127
From 38 to 31	6	73
From 30 to 24	6	69
From 23 to 18	15	59
From 17 to 13	18	49
From 12 to 8	26	49
From 7 to 3	10	42

Every disturbance of equilibrium, even though it achieves greater comfort and a heightening of general vitality, is an impulse to voluntary death. Whenever serious readjustments take place in the social order, whether or not due to a sudden growth or to an unexpected catastrophe, men are more inclined to self-destruction. How is this possible? How can something considered generally to improve existence serve to detach men from it?

For the answer, some preliminary considerations are required.

<sup>ix</sup>To prove that an increase in prosperity diminishes suicides, the attempt has been made to show that they become less when emigration, the escape-valve of poverty, is widely practiced (See Legoyt, pp. 257-59). But cases are numerous where parallelism instead of inverse proportions exist between the two. In Italy from 1876 to 1890 the number of emigrants rose from 76 per 100,000 inhabitants to 335, a figure itself exceeded between 1887 and 1889. At the same time suicides did not cease to grow in numbers.



## II

No living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means. In other words, if his needs require more than can be granted, or even merely something of a different sort, they will be under continual friction and can only function painfully. Movements incapable of production without pain tend not to be reproduced. Unsatisfied tendencies atrophy, and as the impulse to live is merely the result of all the rest, it is bound to weaken as the others relax.

In the animal, at least in a normal condition, this equilibrium is established with automatic spontaneity because the animal depends on purely material conditions. All the organism needs is that the supplies of substance and energy constantly employed in the vital process should be periodically renewed by equivalent quantities; that replacement be equivalent to use. When the void created by existence in its own resources is filled, the animal, satisfied, asks nothing further. Its power of reflection is not sufficiently developed to imagine other ends than those implicit in its physical nature. On the other hand, as the work demanded of each organ itself depends on the general state of vital energy and the needs of organic equilibrium, use is regulated in turn by replacement and the balance is automatic. The limits of one are those of the other; both are fundamental to the constitution of the existence in question, which cannot exceed them.

This is not the case with man, because most of his needs are not dependent on his body or not to the same degree. Strictly speaking, we may consider that the quantity of material supplies necessary to the physical maintenance of a human life is subject to computation, though this be less exact than in the preceding case and a wider margin left for the free combinations of the will; for beyond the indispensable minimum which satisfies nature when instinctive, a more awakened reflection suggests better conditions, seemingly desirable ends craving fulfillment. Such appetites, however, admittedly sooner or later reach a limit which they cannot pass. But how determine the quantity of well-being, comfort or luxury legitimately to be craved by a human being? Nothing appears in man's organic nor in his

psychological constitution which sets a limit to such tendencies. The functioning of individual life does not require them to cease at one point rather than at another; the proof being that they have constantly increased since the beginnings of history, receiving more and more complete satisfaction, yet with no weakening of average health. Above all, how establish their proper variation with different conditions of life, occupations, relative importance of services, etc.? In no society are they equally satisfied in the different stages of the social hierarchy. Yet human nature is substantially the same among all men, in its essential qualities. It is not human nature which can assign the variable limits necessary to our needs. They are thus unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone. Irrespective of any external regulatory force, our capacity for feeling is in itself an insatiable and bottomless abyss.

But if nothing external can restrain this capacity, it can only be a source of torment to itself. Unlimited desires are insatiable by definition and insatiability is rightly considered a sign of morbidity. Being unlimited, they constantly and infinitely surpass the means at their command; they cannot be quenched. Inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture. It has been claimed, indeed, that human activity naturally aspires beyond assignable limits and sets itself unattainable goals. But how can such an undetermined state be any more reconciled with the conditions of mental life than with the demands of physical life? All man's pleasure in acting, moving and exerting himself implies the sense that his efforts are not in vain and that by walking he has advanced. However, one does not advance when one walks toward no goal, or—which is the same thing—when his goal is infinity. Since the distance between us and it is always the same, whatever road we take, we might as well have made the motions without progress from the spot. Even our glances behind and our feeling of pride at the distance covered can cause only deceptive satisfaction, since the remaining distance is not proportionately reduced. To pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness. Of course, man may hope contrary to all reason, and hope has its pleasures even when

unreasonable. It may sustain him for a time; but it cannot survive the repeated disappointments of experience indefinitely. What more can the future offer him than the past, since he can never reach a tenable condition nor even approach the glimpsed ideal? Thus, the more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs. Shall action as such be considered agreeable? First, only on condition of blindness to its uselessness. Secondly, for this pleasure to be felt and to temper and half veil the accompanying painful unrest, such unending motion must at least always be easy and unhampered. If it is interfered with only restlessness is left, with the lack of ease which it, itself, entails. But it would be a miracle if no insurmountable obstacle were never encountered. Our thread of life on these conditions is pretty thin, breakable at any instant.

To achieve any other result, the passions first must be limited. Only then can they be harmonized with the faculties and satisfied. But since the individual has no way of limiting them, this must be done by some force exterior to him. A regulative force must play the same role for moral needs which the organism plays for physical needs. This means that the force can only be moral. The awakening of conscience interrupted the state of equilibrium of the animal's dormant existence; only conscience, therefore, can furnish the means to re-establish it. Physical restraint would be ineffective; hearts cannot be touched by physio-chemical forces. So far as the appetites are not automatically restrained by physiological mechanisms, they can be halted only by a limit that they recognize as just. Men would never consent to restrict their desires if they felt justified in passing the assigned limit. But, for reasons given above, they cannot assign themselves this law of justice. So they must receive it from an authority which they respect, to which they yield spontaneously. Either directly and as a whole or through the agency of one of its organs, society alone can play this moderating role; for it is the only moral power superior to the individual, the authority of which he accepts. It alone has the

power necessary to stipulate law and to set the point beyond which the passions must not go. Finally, it alone can estimate the reward to be prospectively offered to every class of human functionary, in the name of the common interest.

As a matter of fact, at every moment of history there is a dim perception, in the moral consciousness of societies, of the respective value of different social services, the relative reward due to each, and the consequent degree of comfort appropriate on the average to workers in each occupation. The different functions are graded in public opinion and a certain coefficient of well-being assigned to each, according to its place in the hierarchy. According to accepted ideas, for example, a certain way of living is considered the upper limit to which a workman may aspire in his efforts to improve his existence, and there is another limit below which he is not willingly permitted to fall unless he has seriously demeaned himself. Both differ for city and country workers, for the domestic servant and the day-laborer, for the business clerk and the official, etc. Likewise the man of wealth is reproved if he lives the life of a poor man, but also if he seeks the refinements of luxury overmuch. Economists may protest in vain; public feeling will always be scandalized if an individual spends too much wealth for wholly superfluous use, and it even seems that this severity relaxes only in times of moral disturbance.<sup>x</sup> A genuine regimen exists, therefore, although not always legally formulated, which fixes with relative precision the maximum degree of ease of living to which each social class may legitimately aspire. However, there is nothing immutable about such a scale. It changes with the increase or decrease of collective revenue and the changes occurring in the moral ideas of society. Thus what appears luxury to one period no longer does so to another; and the well-being which for long periods was granted to a class only by exception and supererogation, finally appears strictly necessary and equitable.

Under this pressure, each in his sphere vaguely realizes the extreme limit set to his ambitions and aspires to nothing beyond. At least if he respects regulations and is docile to

<sup>x</sup>Actually, this is a purely moral reprobation and can hardly be judicially implemented. We do not consider any reestablishment of sumptuary laws desirable or even possible.

collective authority, that is, has a wholesome moral constitution, he feels that it is not well to ask more. Thus, an end and goal are set to the passions. Truly, there is nothing rigid nor absolute about such determination. The economic ideal assigned each class of citizens is itself confined to certain limits, within which the desires have free range. But it is not infinite. This relative limitation and the moderation it involves, make men contented with their lot while stimulating them moderately to improve it; and this average contentment causes the feeling of calm, active happiness, the pleasure in existing and living which characterizes health for societies as well as for individuals. Each person is then at least, generally speaking, in harmony with his condition, and desires only what he may legitimately hope for as the normal reward of his activity. Besides, this does not condemn man to a sort of immobility. He may seek to give beauty to his life; but his attempts in this direction may fail without causing him to despair. For, loving what he has and not fixing his desire solely on what he lacks, his wishes and hopes may fail of what he has happened to aspire to, without his being wholly destitute. He has the essentials. The equilibrium of his happiness is secure because it is defined, and a few mishaps cannot disconcert him.

But it would be of little use for everyone to recognize the justice of the hierarchy of functions established by public opinion, if he did not also consider the distribution of these functions just. The workman is not in harmony with his social position if he is not convinced that he has his deserts. If he feels justified in occupying another, what he has would not satisfy him. So it is not enough for the average level of needs for each social condition to be regulated by public opinion, but another, more precise rule, must fix the way in which these conditions are open to individuals. There is no society in which such regulation does not exist. It varies with times and places. Once it regarded birth as the almost exclusive principle of social classification; today it recognizes no other inherent inequality than hereditary fortune and merit. But in all these various forms its object is unchanged. It is also only possible, everywhere, as a restriction upon individuals imposed by superior authority, that is, by collective

authority. For it can be established only by requiring of one or another group of men, usually of all, sacrifices and concessions in the name of the public interest.

Some, to be sure, have thought that this moral pressure would become unnecessary if men's economic circumstances were only no longer determined by heredity. If inheritance were abolished, the argument runs, if everyone began life with equal resources and if the competitive struggle were fought out on a basis of perfect equality, no one could think its results unjust. Each would instinctively feel that things are as they should be.

Truly, the nearer this ideal equality were approached, the less social restraint will be necessary. But it is only a matter of degree. One sort of heredity will always exist, that of natural talent. Intelligence, taste, scientific, artistic, literary or industrial ability, courage and manual dexterity are gifts received by each of us at birth, as the heir to wealth receives his capital or as the nobleman formerly received his title and function. A moral discipline will therefore still be required to make those less favored by nature accept the lesser advantages which they owe to the chance of birth. Shall it be demanded that all have an equal share and that no advantage be given those more useful and deserving? But then there would have to be a discipline far stronger to make these accept a treatment merely equal to that of the mediocre and incapable.

But like the one first mentioned, this discipline can be useful only if considered just by the peoples subject to it. When it is maintained only by custom and force, peace and harmony are illusory; the spirit of unrest and discontent are latent; appetites superficially restrained are ready to revolt. This happened in Rome and Greece when the faiths underlying the old organization of the patricians and plebeians were shaken, and in our modern societies when aristocratic prejudices began to lose their old ascendancy. But this state of upheaval is exceptional; it occurs only when society is passing through some abnormal crisis. In normal conditions the collective order is regarded as just by the great majority of persons. Therefore, when we say that an authority is necessary to impose this order on individuals,

we certainly do not mean that violence is the only means of establishing it. Since this regulation is meant to restrain individual passions, it must come from a power which dominates individuals; but this power must also be obeyed through respect, not fear.

It is not true, that human activity can be released from all restraint. Nothing in the world can enjoy such a privilege. All existence being a part of the universe is relative to the remainder; its nature and method of manifestation accordingly depend not only on itself but on other beings, who consequently restrain and regulate it. Here there are only differences of degree and form between the mineral realm and the thinking person. Man's characteristic privilege is that the bond he accepts is not physical but moral; that is, social. He is governed not by a material environment brutally imposed on him, but by a conscience superior to his own, the superiority of which he feels. Because the greater, better part of his existence transcends the body, he escapes the body's yoke, but is subject to that of society.

But when society is disturbed by some painful crisis or by beneficent but abrupt transitions, it is momentarily incapable of exercising this influence; thence come the sudden rises in the curve of suicides which we have pointed out above.

In the case of economic disasters, indeed, something like a declassification occurs which suddenly casts certain individuals into a lower state than their previous one. Then they must reduce their requirements, restrain their needs, learn greater self-control. All the advantages of social influence are lost so far as they are concerned; their moral education has to be recommenced. But society cannot adjust them instantaneously to this new life and teach them to practice the increased self-repression to which they are unaccustomed. So they are not adjusted to the condition forced on them, and its very prospect is intolerable; hence the suffering which detaches them from a reduced existence even before they have made trial of it.

It is the same if the source of the crisis is an abrupt growth of power and wealth. Then, truly, as the conditions of life are changed, the standard according to which needs were regulated can no longer remain the same; for it

varies with social resources, since it largely determines the share of each class of producers. The scale is upset; but a new scale cannot be immediately improvised. Time is required for the public conscience to reclassify men and things. So long as the social forces thus freed have not regained equilibrium, their respective values are unknown and so all regulation is lacking for a time. The limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, what is just and what is unjust, legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate. Consequently, there is no restraint upon aspirations. If the disturbance is profound, it affects even the principles controlling the distribution of men among various occupations. Since the relations between various parts of society are necessarily modified, the ideas expressing these relations must change. Some particular class especially favored by the crisis is no longer resigned to its former lot, and, on the other hand, the example of its greater good fortune arouses all sorts of jealousy below and about it. Appetites, not being controlled by a public opinion become disoriented, no longer recognize the limits proper to them. Besides, they are at the same time seized by a sort of natural erethism simply by the greater intensity of public life. With increased prosperity desires increase. At the very moment when traditional rules have lost their authority, the richer prize offered these appetites stimulates them and makes them more exigent and impatient of control. The state of de-regulation or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining.

But then their very demands make fulfillment impossible. Overweening ambition always exceeds the results obtained, great as they may be, since there is no warning to pause here. Nothing gives satisfaction and all this agitation is uninterruptedly maintained without appeasement. Above all, since this race for an unattainable goal can give no other pleasure but that of the race itself, if it is one, once it is interrupted the participants are left empty-handed. At the same time the struggle grows more violent and painful, both from being less controlled and because competition is greater. All classes contend among themselves because no

established classification any longer exists. Effort grows, just when it becomes less productive. How could the desire to live not be weakened under such conditions?

This explanation is confirmed by the remarkable immunity of poor countries. Poverty protects against suicide because it is a restraint in itself. No matter how one acts, desires have to depend upon resources to some extent; actual possessions are partly the criterion of those aspired to. So the less one has the less he is tempted to extend the range of his needs indefinitely. Lack of power, compelling moderation, accustoms men to it, while nothing excites envy if no one has superfluity. Wealth, on the other hand, by the power it bestows, deceives us into believing that we depend on ourselves only. Reducing the resistance we encounter from objects, it suggests the possibility of unlimited success against them. The less limited one feels, the more intolerable all limitation appears. Not without reason, therefore, have so many religions dwelt on the advantages and moral value of poverty. It is actually the best school for teaching self-restraint. Forcing us to constant self-discipline, it prepares us to accept collective discipline with equanimity, while wealth, exalting the individual, may always arouse the spirit of rebellion which is the very source of immorality. This, of course, is no reason why humanity should not improve its material condition. But though the moral danger involved in every growth of prosperity is not irremediable, it should not be forgotten.

### III

If anomy never appeared except, as in the above instances, in intermittent spurts and acute crisis, it might cause the social suicide-rate to vary from time to time, but it would not be a regular, constant factor. In one sphere of social life, however—the sphere of trade and industry—it is actually in a chronic state.

For a whole century, economic progress has mainly consisted in freeing industrial relations from all regulation. Until very recently, it was the function of a whole system of moral forces to exert this discipline. First, the influence of

religion was felt alike by workers and masters, the poor and the rich. It consoled the former and taught them contentment with their lot by informing them of the providential nature of the social order, that the share of each class was assigned by God himself, and by holding out the hope for just compensation in a world to come in return for the inequalities of this world. It governed the latter, recalling that worldly interests are not man's entire lot, that they must be subordinate to other and higher interests, and that they should therefore not be pursued without rule or measure. Temporal power, in turn, restrained the scope of economic functions by its supremacy over them and by the relatively subordinate role it assigned them. Finally, within the business world proper, the occupational groups by regulating salaries, the price of products and production itself, indirectly fixed the average level of income on which needs are partially based by the very force of circumstances. However, we do not mean to propose this organization as a model. Clearly it would be inadequate to existing societies without great changes. What we stress is its existence, the fact of its useful influence, and that nothing today has come to take its place.

Actually, religion has lost most of its power. And government, instead of regulating economic life, has become its tool and servant. The most opposite schools, orthodox economists and extreme socialists, unite to reduce government to the role of a more or less passive intermediary among the various social functions. The former wish to make it simply the guardian of individual contracts; the latter leave it the task of doing the collective bookkeeping, that is, of recording the demands of consumers, transmitting them to producers, inventorying the total revenue and distributing it according to a fixed formula. But both refuse it any power to subordinate other social organs to itself and to make them converge toward one dominant aim. On both sides nations are declared to have the single or chief purpose of achieving industrial prosperity; such is the implication of the dogma of economic materialism, the basis of both apparently opposed systems. And as these theories merely express the state of opinion, industry, instead of being still regarded as a means to an end transcending

itself, has become the supreme end of individuals and societies alike. Thereupon the appetites thus excited have become freed of any limiting authority. By sanctifying them, so to speak, this apotheosis of well-being has placed them above all human law. Their restraint seems like a sort of sacrilege. For this reason, even the purely utilitarian regulation of them exercised by the industrial world itself through the medium of occupational groups has been unable to persist. Ultimately, this liberation of desires has been made worse by the very development of industry and the almost infinite extension of the market. So long as the producer could gain his profits only in his immediate neighborhood, the restricted amount of possible gain could not much overexcite ambition. Now that he may assume to have almost the entire world as his customer, how could passions accept their former confinement in the face of such limitless prospects?

Such is the source of the excitement predominating in this part of society, and which has thence extended to the other parts. There, the state of crisis and anomy is constant and, so to speak, normal. From top to bottom of the ladder, greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it, since its goal is far beyond all it can attain. Reality seems valueless by comparison with the dreams of fevered imaginations; reality is therefore abandoned, but so too is possibility abandoned when it in turn becomes reality. A thirst arises for novelties, unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations, all of which lose their savor once known. Henceforth one has no strength to endure the least reverse. The whole fever subsides and the sterility of all the tumult is apparent, and it is seen that all these new sensations in their infinite quantity cannot form a solid foundation of happiness to support one during days of trial. The wise man, knowing how to enjoy achieved results without having constantly to replace them with others, finds in them an attachment to life in the hour of difficulty. But the man who has always pinned all his hopes on the future and lived with his eyes fixed upon it, has nothing in the past as a comfort against the present's afflictions, for the past was nothing to him but a series of hastily experienced stages. What blinded him to himself

was his expectation always to find further on the happiness he had so far missed. Now he is stopped in his tracks; from now on nothing remains behind or ahead of him to fix his gaze upon. Weariness alone, moreover, is enough to bring disillusionment, for he cannot in the end escape the futility of an endless pursuit.

We may even wonder if this moral state is not principally what makes economic catastrophes of our day so fertile in suicides. In societies where a man is subjected to a healthy discipline, he submits more readily to the blows of chance. The necessary effort for sustaining a little more discomfort costs him relatively little, since he is used to discomfort and constraint. But when every constraint is hateful in itself, how can closer constraint not seem intolerable? There is no tendency to resignation in the feverish impatience of men's lives. When there is no other aim but to outstrip constantly the point arrived at, how painful to be thrown back! Now this very lack of organization characterizing our economic condition throws the door wide to every sort of adventure. Since imagination is hungry for novelty, and ungoverned, it gropes at random. Setbacks necessarily increase with risks and thus crises multiply, just when they are becoming more destructive.

Yet these dispositions are so inbred that society has grown to accept them and is accustomed to think them normal. It is everlastingly repeated that it is man's nature to be eternally dissatisfied, constantly to advance, without relief or rest, toward an indefinite goal. The longing for infinity is daily represented as a mark of moral distinction, whereas it can only appear within unregulated consciences which elevate to a rule the lack of rule from which they suffer. The doctrine of the most ruthless and swift progress has become an article of faith. But other theories appear parallel with those praising the advantages of instability, which, generalizing the situation that gives them birth, declare life evil, claim that it is richer in grief than in pleasure and that it attracts men only by false claims. Since this disorder is greatest in the economic world, it has most victims there.

Industrial and commercial functions are really among the occupations which furnish the greatest number of suicides (see Table XXIV).

**Table XXIV** Suicides per Million Persons of Different Occupations

	Trade	Transportation	Industry	Agriculture	Liberal* Professions
France (1878–87) <sup>†</sup>	440	–	340	240	300
Switzerland (1876)	664	1,514	577	304	558
Italy (1866–76)	277	152.6	80.4	26.7	618 <sup>‡</sup>
Prussia (1883–90)	754	–	456	315	832
Bavaria (1884–91)	465	–	369	153	454
Belgium (1886–90)	421	–	160	160	100
Wurttemberg (1873–78)	273	–	190	206	–
Saxony (1878)		341.59 <sup>§</sup>		71.17	–

\* When statistics distinguish several different sorts of liberal occupation, we show as a specimen the one in which the suicide-rate is highest.

† From 1826 to 1880 economic functions seem less affected (see *Compte-rendu* of 1880); but were occupational statistics very accurate?

‡ This figure is reached only by men of letters.

§ Figure represents Trade, Transportation, and Industry combined for Saxony. Ed.

Almost on a level with the liberal professions, they sometimes surpass them; they are especially more afflicted than agriculture, where the old regulative forces still make their appearance felt most and where the fever of business has least penetrated. Here is best called what was once the general constitution of the economic order. And the divergence would be yet greater if, among the suicides of industry, employers were distinguished from workmen, for the former are probably most stricken by the state of anomy. The enormous rate of those with independent means (720 per million) sufficiently shows that the possessors of most comfort suffer most. Everything that enforces subordination attenuates the effects of this state. At least the horizon of the lower classes is limited by those above them, and for this same reason their desires are more modest. Those who have only empty space above them are almost inevitably lost in it, if no force restrains them.

Anomy, therefore, is a regular and specific factor in suicide in our modern societies; one of the springs from which the annual contingent feeds. So we have here a new type

to distinguish from the others. It differs from them in its dependence, not on the way in which individuals are attached to society, but on how it regulates them. Egoistic suicide results from man's no longer finding a basis for existence in life; altruistic suicide, because this basis for existence appears to man situated beyond life itself. The third sort of suicide, the existence of which has just been shown, results from man's activity's lacking regulation and his consequent sufferings. By virtue of its origin we shall assign this last variety the name of *anomic suicide*.

Certainly, this and egoistic suicide have kindred ties. Both spring from society's insufficient presence in individuals. But the sphere of its absence is not the same in both cases. In egoistic suicide it is deficient in truly collective activity, thus depriving the latter of object and meaning. In anomic suicide, society's influence is lacking in the basically individual passions, thus leaving them without a check-rein. In spite of their relationship, therefore, the two types are independent of each other. We may offer society everything social in us, and still be unable to control our desires;

one may live in an anomic state without being egoistic, and vice versa. These two sorts of suicide therefore do not draw their chief recruits from the same social environments; one has its principal field among intellectual careers, the world of thought—the other, the industrial or commercial world.

#### IV

But economic anomy is not the only anomy which may give rise to suicide.

The suicides occurring at the crisis of widowhood, of which we have already spoken<sup>xi</sup> are really due to domestic anomy resulting from the death of husband or wife. A family catastrophe occurs which affects the survivor. He is not adapted to the new situation in which he finds himself and accordingly offers less resistance to suicide.

But another variety of anomic suicide should draw greater attention, both because it is more chronic and because it will serve to illustrate the nature and functions of marriage.

In the *Annales de démographie internationale* (September 1882), Bertillon published a remarkable study of divorce, in which he proved the following proposition: throughout Europe the number of suicides varies with that of divorces and separations [Table XXV illustrates such variations]. . . .

#### INDIVIDUAL FORMS OF THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUICIDE

One result now stands out prominently from our investigation: namely, that there are not one but various forms of suicide. Of course, suicide is always the act of a man who prefers death to life. But the causes determining him are not of the same sort in all cases: they are even sometimes mutually opposed. Now, such difference in causes must reappear in their effects. We may therefore be sure that there are several sorts of suicide which are distinct in quality from one another. But the certainty that these differences exist is not enough; we need to observe them directly and know of what they consist. We need to see the

characteristics of special suicides grouped in distinct classes corresponding to the types just distinguished. Thus we would follow the various currents which generate suicide from their social origins to their individual manifestations.

This morphological classification, which was hardly possible at the commencement of this study, may be undertaken now that an aetiological classification forms its basis. Indeed, we only need to start with the three kinds of factors which we have just assigned to suicide and discover whether the distinctive properties it assumes in manifesting itself among individual persons may be derived from them, and if so, how. Of course, not all the peculiarities which suicide may present can be deduced in this fashion; for some may exist which depend solely on the person's own nature. Each victim of suicide gives his act a personal stamp which expresses his temperament, the special conditions in which he is involved, and which, consequently, cannot be explained by the social and general causes of the phenomenon. But these causes in turn must stamp the suicides they determine with a shade all their own, a special mark expressive of them. This collective mark we must find.

To be sure, this can be done only approximately. We are not in a position to describe methodically all the suicides daily committed by men or committed in the course of history. We can only emphasize the most general and striking characteristics without even having an objective criterion for making the selection. Moreover, we can only proceed deductively in relating them to the respective causes from which they seem to spring. All that we can do is to show their logical implication, though the reasoning may not always be able to receive experimental confirmation. We do not forget that a deduction uncontrolled by experiment is always questionable. Yet this research is far from being useless, even with these reservations. Even though it may be considered only a method of illustrating the preceding results by examples, it would still have the worth of giving them a more concrete character by connecting them more closely with the data of sense-perception and with the details of daily experience. It will also introduce some little distinctiveness into this mass of facts usually lumped together as though varying only by

<sup>xi</sup>See above, Book II, Ch. 3.



**Table XXV** Comparison of European States from the Point of View of Both Divorce and Suicide

	Annual Divorces per 1,000 Marriages		Suicides per Million Inhabitants
<b>I. Countries Where Divorce and Separation Are Rare</b>			
Norway	0.54	(1875–80)	73
Russia	1.6	(1871–77)	30
England and Wales	1.3	(1871–79)	68
Scotland	2.1	(1871–81)	—
Italy	3.05	(1871–73)	31
Finland	3.9	(1875–79)	30.8
Averages	2.07		46.5
<b>II. Countries Where Divorce and Separation Are of Average Frequency</b>			
Bavaria	5.0	(1881)	90.5
Belgium	5.1	(1871–80)	68.5
Holland	6.0	(1871–80)	35.5
Sweden	6.4	(1871–80)	81
Baden	6.5	(1874–79)	156.6
France	7.5	(1871–79)	150
Wurttemberg	8.4	(1876–78)	162.4
Prussia	—		133
Averages	6.4		109.6
<b>III. Countries Where Divorce and Separation Are Frequent</b>			
Kingdom of Saxony	26.9	(1876–80)	299
Denmark	38	(1871–80)	258
Switzerland	47	(1876–80)	216
Averages	37.3		257

shades, though there are striking differences among them. Suicide is like mental alienation. For the popular mind the latter consists in a single state, always identical, capable only of superficial differentiation according to circumstances. For the alienist, on the contrary, the word denotes

many nosological types. Every suicide is, likewise, ordinarily considered a victim of melancholy whose life has become a burden to him. Actually, the acts by which a man renounces life belong to different species, of wholly different moral and social significance.



## Introduction to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

In his final and most theoretically acclaimed book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim sought to explain the way the moral realm worked by focusing on religion. Durkheim saw religious ceremonies not merely as a celebration of supernatural deities, but as a worshipping of social life itself, such that as long as there are societies, there will be religion (Robertson 1970:13).

In other words, for Durkheim, social life—whether in traditional or modern society—is inherently religious, for “religious force is nothing other than the collective and anonymous force” of society (Durkheim 1912/1995:210). The worship of transcendent gods or spirits

and the respect and awe accorded to their power is in actuality the worship of the social group and the force it exerts over the individual. No matter how “simple” or “complex” the society, religion is thus a “system of ideas with which the individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it . . . for it is an eternal truth that outside of us there exists something greater than us, with which we enter into communion” (ibid.:257). For Durkheim, this outside power, this “something greater” is society.

In saying that social life is inherently religious, Durkheim defined religion in a very broad way. For Durkheim, “religion” does not mean solely “churchly” or institutional things; rather, religion is a system of symbols and rituals about the sacred that is practiced by a community of believers. This definition of religion is often called “functionalist” rather than “substantive” because it emphasizes not the substantive content of religion, such as particular rituals or doctrines (e.g., baptisms or bar mitzvahs, or belief in an afterlife, higher beings, etc.), but the social *function* of religion.

For Durkheim, the primary function of religion is to encode the system of relations of the group (Eliade and Couliano 1991:2). It focuses and reaffirms the collective sentiments and ideas that hold the group together. Religious practices, accordingly, serve to bind participants together in celebration of the society (Robertson 1970:15). As Durkheim (1912/1995:429) states,

[t]here can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which makes its unity and its personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments.

This communal function of religion is carried out through the dual processes of ritualization and symbolization. A **ritual** is a highly routinized act such as taking communion. As the name reveals, the Christian ritual of communion not only commemorates a historical event in the life of Jesus, but also represents participation in the unity (“communion”) of believers (McGuire 1997:187). Most interestingly, because they are practices (not beliefs or values), rituals can unite a social group regardless of individual differences in beliefs or strength of convictions. It is the common *experience* and *focus* that binds the participants together (see Photos 3.3a and 3.3b).

Because the central issue for Durkheim is communal practice and experience (rather than symbolic content), Durkheim sees no essential difference between “religious” and “secular” ritual acts. “Let us pray” (an opening moment in a religious service) and “Let us stand for the national anthem” (an opening moment of a baseball game) are both ritual acts that bond the individual to a community. In exactly the same way, Durkheim suggested that there is no essential difference between religious holidays, such as Passover or Christmas, and secular holidays, such as Independence Day or Thanksgiving. Both are collective celebrations of identity and community (see Edles 2002:27–30). Individuals know they are moved; they just don’t understand the real causes for their feelings. Religious ritual moments are ones in which the moral authority of the group is perceived as (or chalked up to) a *spiritual* force.

As noted above, in addition to ritual practices, there is another important means through which the communal function of religion is achieved: symbolization. A **symbol** is something that stands for something else. It is a representation that calls up collective ideas and meanings. Thus, for instance, a “cross” is a marker that symbolizes Christian spirituality or tradition. Wearing a cross on a necklace often *means* that one is a Christian. It identifies the wearer as a member of a specific religious community or specific shared ideas (e.g., a religious tradition in which Jesus Christ is understood as the son of God). Most importantly, symbols such as the cross are capable of calling up and reaffirming shared meaning and the



**Photo 3.3a** Congregation Taking Communion at a Catholic Church



**Photo 3.3b** Fans at Sporting Event Doing “the Wave”

Both church goers and sports fans engage in communal ritual acts. As Durkheim (1912/1995:262) states, “It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object that they become and feel themselves to be in unison.”

feeling of community in between periodic ritual acts (such as religious celebrations and weekly church services). As Durkheim (1912/1995:232) states, “Without symbols, social sentiments could have only a precarious existence.”

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim explains that symbols are classified as fundamentally sacred or profane. The **sacred** refers to the extraordinary, that

which is set apart from and “above and beyond” the everyday world. In direct contrast to the sacred realm, is the realm of the everyday world of the mundane or routine, or the **profane**. Most importantly, objects are intrinsically neither sacred nor profane; rather, their meaning or classification is continually produced and reproduced (or altered) in collective processes of ritualization and symbolization. Thus, for instance, lighting a candle can either be a relatively mundane task to provide light or it can be a sacred act, as in the case of the Jewish ritual of lighting a candle to commemorate the Sabbath (McGuire 1997:17). In the latter context, this act denotes a sacred *moment* as well as a celebration. This points to the central function of the distinction between the sacred and the profane. It imposes an orderly system on the inherently untidy experience of living (Gamson 1998:141). Thus, for instance, ritual practices (e.g., standing for the national anthem or lighting a candle to commemorate the Sabbath) transform a profane moment into a sacred moment, while sacred sites (churches, mosques, synagogues) differentiate “routine” places from those that compel attitudes of awe and inspiration. The symbolic plasticity of time and space is especially apparent in the way devout Muslims (who often must pray in everyday, mundane settings in order to fulfill their religious duties) carry out the frequent prayers required by their religion. They lay down a (sacred) prayer carpet in their office or living room, thereby enabling them to convert a profane time and space into a sacred time and space. This temporal and spatial reordering transforms the profane realm of work or home into a spiritual, sacred domain. Such acts, and countless others, help order and organize our experience of the world by carving it into that which is extraordinary or sacred and that which is unremarkable or profane.

## — From *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) —

Émile Durkheim

### PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

Religious phenomena are naturally arranged in two fundamental categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion, and consist in representations; the second are determined modes of action. Between these two classes of facts, there is all the difference that separates thought from action.

The rites can be defined and distinguished from other human practices, moral practices, for example, only by the special nature of their object. A moral rule prescribes certain manners of acting to us, just as a rite does, but which are addressed to a different class of objects. So it is the object of the rite that must be characterized, if we are to characterize the rite itself. Now it is in the beliefs that the special nature of this object is expressed. It is possible to define the rite only after we have defined the belief.

All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they

presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words *profane* and *sacred* (*profane*, *sacré*). This division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought; the beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with profane things. But by sacred things one must not understand simply those personal beings which are called gods or spirits; a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word, anything can be sacred. A rite can have this character; in fact, the rite does not exist which does not have it to a certain degree. There are words, expressions and formulae which can be pronounced only by the mouths of

consecrated persons; there are gestures and movements which everybody cannot perform. If the Vedic sacrifice has had such an efficacy that, according to mythology, it was the creator of the gods, and not merely a means of winning their favour, it is because it possessed a virtue comparable to that of the most sacred beings. The circle of sacred objects cannot be determined, then, once for all. Its extent varies infinitely, according to the different religions. That is how Buddhism is a religion: in default of gods, it admits the existence of sacred things, namely, the four noble truths and the practices derived from them.<sup>i</sup>

Up to the present we have confined ourselves to enumerating a certain number of sacred things as examples: we must now show by what general characteristics they are to be distinguished from profane things.

One might be tempted, first of all, to define them by the place they are generally assigned in the hierarchy of things. They are naturally considered superior in dignity and power to profane things, and particularly to man, when he is only a man and has nothing sacred about him. One thinks of himself as occupying an inferior and dependent position in relation to them; and surely this conception is not without some truth. Only there is nothing in it which is really characteristic of the sacred. It is not enough that one thing be subordinated to another for the second to be sacred in regard to the first. Slaves are inferior to their masters, subjects to their king, soldiers to their leaders, the miser to his gold, the man ambitious for power to the hands which keep it from him; but if it is sometimes said of a man that he makes a religion of those beings or things whose eminent value and superiority to himself he thus recognizes, it is clear that in any case the word is taken in a metaphorical sense, and that there is nothing in these relations which is really religious.<sup>ii</sup>

On the other hand, it must not be lost to view that there are sacred things of every degree, and that there are some in relation to which a man feels himself relatively at his ease. An amulet has a sacred character, yet the respect which it inspires is nothing exceptional. Even before his gods, a man is not always in

such a marked state of inferiority; for it very frequently happens that he exercises a veritable physical constraint upon them to obtain what he desires. He beats the fetish with which he is not contented, but only to reconcile himself with it again, if in the end it shows itself more docile to the wishes of its adorer. . . . To have rain, he throws stones into the spring or sacred lake where the god of rain is thought to reside; he believes that by this means he forces him to come out and show himself. . . . Moreover, if it is true that man depends upon his gods, this dependence is reciprocal. The gods also have need of man; without offerings and sacrifices they would die. We shall even have occasion to show that this dependence of the gods upon their worshippers is maintained even in the most idealistic religions.

But if a purely hierarchic distinction is a criterion at once too general and too imprecise, there is nothing left with which to characterize the sacred in its relation to the profane except their heterogeneity. However, this heterogeneity is sufficient to characterize this classification of things and to distinguish it from all others, because it is very particular: *it is absolute*. In all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another. The traditional opposition of good and bad is nothing beside this; for the good and the bad are only two opposed species of the same class, namely morals, just as sickness and health are two different aspects of the same order of facts, life, while the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common. The forces which play in one are not simply those which are met with in the other, but a little stronger; they are of a different sort. In different religions, this opposition has been conceived in different ways. Here, to separate these two sorts of things, it has seemed sufficient to localize them in different parts of the physical universe; there, the first have been put into an ideal and transcendental world, while the material world is left in full possession of

<sup>i</sup>Not to mention the sage and the saint who practice these truths and who for that reason are sacred.

<sup>ii</sup>This is not saying that these relations cannot take a religious character. But they do not do so necessarily.

the others. But howsoever much the forms of the contrast may vary,<sup>iii</sup> the fact of the contrast is universal.

This is not equivalent to saying that a being can never pass from one of these worlds into the other: but the manner in which this passage is effected when it does take place, puts into relief the essential duality of the two kingdoms. In fact, it implies a veritable metamorphosis. This is notably demonstrated by the initiation rites, such as they are practiced by a multitude of peoples. This initiation is a long series of ceremonies with the object of introducing the young man into the religious life: for the first time, he leaves the purely profane world where he passed his first infancy, and enters into the world of sacred things. Now this change of state is thought of, not as a simple and regular development of pre-existent germs, but as a transformation *totius substantiae*—of the whole being. It is said that at this moment the young man dies, that the person that he was ceases to exist, and that another is instantly substituted for it. He is re-born under a new form. Appropriate ceremonies are felt to bring about this death and re-birth, which are not understood in a merely symbolic sense, but are taken literally. . . . Does this not prove that between the profane being which he was and the religious being which he becomes, there is a break of continuity?

This heterogeneity is even so complete that it frequently degenerates into a veritable antagonism. The two worlds are not only conceived of as separate, but as even hostile and jealous rivals of each other. Since men cannot fully belong to one except on condition of leaving the other completely, they are exhorted to withdraw themselves completely from the profane world, in order to lead an exclusively religious life. Hence comes the monasticism which is artificially organized outside of and apart from the natural environment in which the ordinary man leads the life of this world, in a different one, closed to the first, and nearly its contrary. Hence comes the mystic asceticism whose object is to root out from man all the attachment for the profane

world that remains in him. From that come all the forms of religious suicide, the logical working-out of this asceticism; for the only manner of fully escaping the profane life is, after all, to forsake all life.

The opposition of these two classes manifests itself outwardly with a visible sign by which we can easily recognize this very special classification, wherever it exists. Since the idea of the sacred is always and everywhere separated from the idea of the profane in the thought of men, and since we picture a sort of logical chasm between the two, the mind irresistibly refuses to allow the two corresponding things to be confounded, or even to be merely put in contact with each other; for such a promiscuity, or even too direct a contiguity, would contradict too violently the dissociation of these ideas in the mind. The sacred thing is *par excellence* that which the profane should not touch, and cannot touch with impunity. . . .

Thus we arrive at the first criterium of religious beliefs. Undoubtedly there are secondary species within these two fundamental classes which, in their turn, are more or less incomparable with each other. . . . But the real characteristic of religious phenomena is that they always suppose a bipartite division of the whole universe, known and knowable, into two classes which embrace all that exists, but which radically exclude each other. Sacred things are those which the interdictions protect and isolate; profane things, those to which these interdictions are applied and which must remain at a distance from the first. Religious beliefs are the representations which express the nature of sacred things and the relations which they sustain, either with each other or with profane things. Finally, rites are the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects.

When a certain number of sacred things sustain relations of co-ordination or subordination with each other in such a way as to form a system having a certain unity, but which is not comprised within any other system of the same

<sup>iii</sup>The conception according to which the profane is opposed to the sacred, just as the irrational is to the rational, or the intelligible is to the mysterious, is only one of the forms under which this opposition is expressed. Science being once constituted, it has taken a profane character, especially in the eyes of the Christian religions; from that it appears as though it could not be applied to sacred things.

sort, the totality of these beliefs and their corresponding rites constitutes a religion. From this definition it is seen that a religion is not necessarily contained within one sole and single idea, and does not proceed from one unique principle which, though varying according to the circumstances under which it is applied, is nevertheless at bottom always the same: it is rather a whole made up of distinct and relatively individualized parts. Each homogeneous group of sacred things, or even each sacred thing of some importance, constitutes a centre of organization about which gravitate a group of beliefs and rites, or a particular cult; there is no religion, howsoever unified it may be, which does not recognize a plurality of sacred things. . . .

However, this definition is not yet complete, for it is equally applicable to two sorts of facts which, while being related to each other, must be distinguished nevertheless: these are magic and religion.

Magic, too, is made up of beliefs and rites. Like religion, it has its myths and its dogmas; only they are more elementary, undoubtedly because, seeking technical and utilitarian ends, it does not waste its time in pure speculation. It has its ceremonies, sacrifices, lustrations, prayers, chants and dances as well. The beings which the magician invokes and the forces which he throws in play are not merely of the same nature as the forces and beings to which religion addresses itself; very frequently, they are identically the same. Thus, even with the most inferior societies, the souls of the dead are essentially sacred things, and the object of religious rites. But at the same time, they play a considerable role in magic. . . .

Then will it be necessary to say that magic is hardly distinguishable from religion; that magic is full of religion just as religion is full of magic, and consequently that it is impossible to separate them and to define the one without the other? It is difficult to sustain this thesis, because of the marked repugnance of religion for magic, and in return, the hostility of the second towards the first. Magic takes a sort of professional pleasure in profaning holy things. . . . On its side, religion, when it has not condemned and prohibited magic rites, has always looked upon them with disfavor. . . . Whatever relations there may be

between these two sorts of institutions, it is difficult to imagine their not being opposed somewhere; and it is still more necessary for us to find where they are differentiated, as we plan to limit our researches to religion, and to stop at the point where magic commences.

Here is how a line of demarcation can be traced between these two domains.

The really religious beliefs are always common to a determined group, which makes profession of adhering to them and of practicing the rites connected with them. They are not merely received individually by all the members of this group; they are something belonging to the group, and they make its unity. The individuals which compose it feel themselves united to each other by the simple fact that they have a common faith. A society whose members are united by the fact that they think in the same way in regard to the sacred world and its relations with the profane world, and by the fact that they translate these common ideas into common practices, is what is called a Church. In all history, we do not find a single religion without a Church. Sometimes the Church is strictly national, sometimes it passes the frontiers; sometimes it embraces an entire people (Rome, Athens, the Hebrews), sometimes it embraces only a part of them (the Christian societies since the advent of Protestantism); sometimes it is directed by a corps of priests, sometimes it is almost completely devoid of any official directing body. But wherever we observe the religious life, we find that it has a definite group as its foundation. . . .

It is quite another matter with magic. To be sure, the belief in magic is always more or less general; it is very frequently diffused in large masses of the population, and there are even peoples where it has as many adherents as the real religion. But it does not result in binding together those who adhere to it, nor in uniting them into a group leading a common life. *There is no Church of magic.* Between the magician and the individuals who consult him, as between these individuals themselves, there are no lasting bonds which make them members of the same moral community, comparable to that formed by the believers in the same god or the observers of the same cult. The magician has a clientele and not a Church, and

it is very possible that his clients have no other relations between each other, or even do not know each other; even the relations which they have with him are generally accidental and transient; they are just like those of a sick man with his physician. The official and public character with which he is sometimes invested changes nothing in this situation; the fact that he works openly does not unite him more regularly or more durably to those who have recourse to his services.

It is true that in certain cases, magicians form societies among themselves: it happens that they assemble more or less periodically to celebrate certain rites in common; it is well known what a place these assemblies of witches hold in European folk-lore. But it is to be remarked that these associations are in no way indispensable to the working of the magic; they are even rare and rather exceptional. The magician has no need of uniting himself to his fellows to practice his art. More frequently, he is a recluse; in general, far from seeking society, he flees it. . . .

Religion, on the other hand, is inseparable from the idea of a Church. From this point of view, there is an essential difference between magic and religion. But what is especially important is that when these societies of magic are formed, they do not include all the adherents to magic, but only the magicians; the laymen, if they may be so called, that is to say, those for whose profit the rites are celebrated, in fine those who represent the worshippers in the regular cults, are excluded. Now the magician is for magic what the priest is for religion, but a college of priests is not a Church, any more than a religious congregation which should devote itself to some particular saint in the shadow of a cloister, would be a particular cult. A Church is not a fraternity of priests; it is a moral community formed by all the believers in a single faith, laymen as well as priests. But magic lacks any such community. . . .

But if the idea of a Church is made to enter into the definition of religion, does that not exclude the private religions which the individual establishes for himself and celebrates by himself? There is scarcely a society where these are not found. Every Ojibway . . . has his own personal *manitou*, which he chooses himself and to which he renders special religious services;

the Melanesian of the Banks Islands has his *tamaniu* . . . the Christian, his patron saint and guardian angel, etc. By definition all these cults seem to be independent of all idea of the group. Not only are these individual religions very frequent in history, but nowadays many are asking if they are not destined to be the pre-eminent form of the religious life, and if the day will not come when there will be no other cult than that which each man will freely perform within himself. . . .

But if we leave these speculations in regard to the future aside for the moment, and confine ourselves to religions such as they are at present or have been in the past, it becomes clearly evident that these individual cults are not distinct and autonomous religious systems, but merely aspects of the common religion of the whole Church, of which the individuals are members. The patron saint of the Christian is chosen from the official list of saints recognized by the Catholic Church; there are even canonical rules prescribing how each Catholic should perform this private cult. In the same way, the idea that each man necessarily has a protecting genius is found, under different forms, at the basis of a great number of American religions, as well as of the Roman religion (to cite only these two examples); for, as will be seen later, it is very closely connected with the idea of the soul, and this idea of the soul is not one of those which can be left entirely to individual choice. In a word, it is the Church of which he is a member which teaches the individual what these personal gods are, what their function is, how he should enter into relations with them and how he should honour them. When a methodical analysis is made of the doctrines of any Church whatsoever, sooner or later we come upon those concerning private cults. So these are not two religions of different types, and turned in opposite directions; both are made up of the same ideas and the same principles, here applied to circumstances which are of interest to the group as a whole, there to the life of the individual. . . .

There still remain those contemporary aspirations towards a religion which would consist entirely in internal and subjective states, and which would be constructed freely by each of us. But howsoever real these aspirations may be, they cannot affect our definition, for this is to be



applied only to facts already realized, and not to uncertain possibilities. One can define religions such as they are, or such as they have been, but not such as they more or less vaguely tend to become. It is possible that this religious individualism is destined to be realized in facts; but before we can say just how far this may be the case, we must first know what religion is, of what elements it is made up, from what causes it results, and what function it fulfils—all questions whose solution cannot be foreseen before the threshold of our study has been passed. It is only at the close of this study that we can attempt to anticipate the future.

Thus we arrive at the following definition: *A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.* The second element which thus finds a place in our definition is no less essential than the first; for by showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing. . . .

## ORIGINS OF THESE BELIEFS

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It is obviously not out of the sensations which the things serving as totems are able to arouse in the mind; we have shown that these things are frequently insignificant. The lizard, the caterpillar, the rat, the ant, the frog, the turkey, the bream-fish, the plum-tree, the cockatoo, etc., to cite only those names which appear frequently in the lists of Australian totems, are not of a nature to produce upon men these great and strong impressions which in a way resemble religious emotions and which impress a sacred character upon the objects they create. It is true that this is not the case with the stars and the great atmospheric phenomena, which have, on the contrary, all that is necessary to strike the imagination forcibly; but as a matter of fact, these serve only very exceptionally as totems. It is even probable that they were very slow in taking this office. So it is not the intrinsic nature of the thing whose name the clan bears that marked it out to become the object of a cult. Also, if the sentiments which

it inspired were really the determining cause of the totemic rites and beliefs, it would be the pre-eminently sacred thing; the animals or plants employed as totems would play an eminent part in the religious life. But we know that the centre of the cult is actually elsewhere. It is the figurative representations of this plant or animal and the totemic emblems and symbols of every sort, which have the greatest sanctity; so it is in them that is found the source of that religious nature, of which the real objects represented by these emblems receive only a reflection.

Thus the totem is before all a symbol, a material expression of something else. But of what?

From the analysis to which we have been giving our attention, it is evident that it expresses and symbolizes two different sorts of things. In the first place, it is the outward and visible form of what we have called the totemic principle or god. But it is also the symbol of the determined society called the clan. It is its flag; it is the sign by which each clan distinguishes itself from the others, the visible mark of its personality, a mark borne by everything which is a part of the clan under any title whatsoever, men, beasts or things. So if it is at once the symbol of the god and of the society, is that not because the god and the society are only one? How could the emblem of the group have been able to become the figure of this quasi-divinity, if the group and the divinity were two distinct realities? The god of the clan, the totemic principle, can therefore be nothing else than the clan itself, personified and represented to the imagination under the visible form of the animal or vegetable which serves as totem.

But how has this apotheosis been possible, and how did it happen to take place in this fashion?

## II

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In a general way, it is unquestionable that a society has all that is necessary to arouse the sensation of the divine in minds, merely by the power that it has over them; for to its members it is what a god is to his worshippers. In fact, a god is, first of all, a being whom men think of as superior to themselves, and upon whom they feel that they depend. Whether it be a conscious

personality, such as Zeus or Jahveh, or merely abstract forces such as those in play in totemism, the worshipper, in the one case as in the other, believes himself held to certain manners of acting which are imposed upon him by the nature of the sacred principle with which he feels that he is in communion. Now society also gives us the sensation of a perpetual dependence. Since it has a nature which is peculiar to itself and different from our individual nature, it pursues ends which are likewise special to it; but, as it cannot attain them except through our intermediacy, it imperiously demands our aid. It requires that, forgetful of our own interest, we make ourselves its servitors, and it submits us to every sort of inconvenience, privation and sacrifice, without which social life would be impossible. It is because of this that at every instant we are obliged to submit ourselves to rules of conduct and of thought which we have neither made nor desired, and which are sometimes even contrary to our most fundamental inclinations and instincts.

Even if society were unable to obtain these concessions and sacrifices from us except by a material constraint, it might awaken in us only the idea of a physical force to which we must give way of necessity, instead of that of a moral power such as religious adore. But as a matter of fact, the empire which it holds over consciences is due much less to the physical supremacy of which it has the privilege than to the moral authority with which it is invested. If we yield to its orders, it is not merely because it is strong enough to triumph over our resistance; it is primarily because it is the object of a venerable respect.

We say that an object, whether individual or collective, inspires respect when the representation expressing it in the mind is gifted with such a force that it automatically causes or inhibits actions, *without regard for any consideration relative to their useful or injurious effects*. When we obey somebody because of the moral authority which we recognize in him, we follow out his opinions, not because they seem wise, but because a certain sort of physical

energy is imminent in the idea that we form of this person, which conquers our will and inclines it in the indicated direction. Respect is the emotion which we experience when we feel this interior and wholly spiritual pressure operating upon us. Then we are not determined by the advantages or inconveniences of the attitude which is prescribed or recommended to us; it is by the way in which we represent to ourselves the person recommending or prescribing it. This is why commands generally take a short, peremptory form leaving no place for hesitation; it is because, in so far as it is a command and goes by its own force, it excludes all idea of deliberation or calculation; it gets its efficacy from the intensity of the mental state in which it is placed. It is this intensity which creates what is called a moral ascendancy.

Now the ways of action to which society is strongly enough attached to impose them upon its members, are, by that very fact, marked with a distinctive sign provocative of respect. Since they are elaborated in common, the vigour with which they have been thought of by each particular mind is retained in all the other minds, and reciprocally. The representations which express them within each of us have an intensity which no purely private states of consciousness could ever attain; for they have the strength of the innumerable individual representations which have served to form each of them. It is society who speaks through the mouths of those who affirm them in our presence; it is society whom we hear in hearing them; and the voice of all has an accent which that of one alone could never have.<sup>iv</sup> The very violence with which society reacts, by way of blame or material suppression, against every attempted dissidence, contributes to strengthening its empire by manifesting the common conviction through this burst of ardour.<sup>v</sup> In a word, when something is the object of such a state of opinion, the representation which each individual has of it gains a power of action from its origins and the conditions in which it was born, which even those feel who do not submit themselves to it. It tends to repel the representations which contradict it, and it keeps them at a distance; on

<sup>iv</sup>See our *Division du travail social*, 3rd ed., pp. 64 ff.

<sup>v</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

the other hand, it commands those acts which will realize it, and it does so, not by a material coercion or by the perspective of something of this sort, but by the simple radiation of the mental energy which it contains. It has an efficacy coming solely from its psychical properties, and it is by just this sign that moral authority is recognized. So opinion, primarily a social thing, is a source of authority, and it might even be asked whether all authority is not the daughter of opinion.<sup>vi</sup> It may be objected that science is often the antagonist of opinion, whose errors it combats and rectifies. But it cannot succeed in this task if it does not have sufficient authority, and it can obtain this authority only from opinion itself. If a people did not have faith in science, all the scientific demonstrations in the world would be without any influence whatsoever over their minds. Even to-day, if science happened to resist a very strong current of public opinion, it would risk losing its credit there.<sup>vii</sup>

Since it is in spiritual ways that social pressure exercises itself, it could not fail to give men the idea that outside themselves there exist one or several powers, both moral and, at the same time, efficacious, upon which they depend. They must think of these powers, at least in part, as outside themselves, for these address them in a tone of command and sometimes even order them to do violence to their most natural inclinations. It is undoubtedly true that if they were able to see that these influences which they feel emanate from society, then the mythological system of interpretations would never be born. But social

action follows ways that are too circuitous and obscure, and employs psychical mechanisms that are too complex to allow the ordinary observer to see when it comes. As long as scientific analysis does not come to teach it to them, men know well that they are acted upon, but they do not know by whom. So they must invent by themselves the idea of these powers with which they feel themselves in connection, and from that, we are able to catch a glimpse of the way by which they were led to represent them under forms that are really foreign to their nature and to transfigure them by thought.

But a god is not merely an authority upon whom we depend; it is a force upon which our strength relies. The man who has obeyed his god and who for this reason, believes the god is with him, approaches the world with confidence and with the feeling of an increased energy. Likewise, social action does not confine itself to demanding sacrifices, privations and efforts from us. For the collective force is not entirely outside of us; it does not act upon us wholly from without; but rather, since society cannot exist except in and through individual consciousness,<sup>viii</sup> this force must also penetrate us and organize itself within us; it thus becomes an integral part of our being and by that very fact this is elevated and magnified.

There are occasions when this strengthening and vivifying action of society is especially apparent. In the midst of an assembly animated by a common passion, we become susceptible of acts and sentiments of which we are incapable when reduced to our own forces; and when the

<sup>vi</sup>This is the case at least with all moral authority recognized as such by the group as a whole.

<sup>vii</sup>We hope that this analysis and those which follow will put an end to an inexact interpretation of our thought, from which more than one misunderstanding has resulted. Since we have made constraint the *outward sign* by which social facts can be the most easily recognized and distinguished from the facts of individual psychology, it has been assumed that according to our opinion, physical constraint is the essential thing for social life. As a matter of fact, we have never considered it more than the material and apparent expression of an interior and profound fact which is wholly ideal: this is *moral authority*. The problem of sociology—if we can speak of a sociological problem—consists in seeking, among the different forms of external constraint, the different sorts of moral authority corresponding to them and in discovering the causes which have determined these latter. The particular question which we are treating in this present work has as its principal object, the discovery of the form under which that particular variety of moral authority which is inherent in all that is religious has been born, and out of what elements it is made. It will be seen presently that even if we do make social pressure one of the distinctive characteristics of sociological phenomena, we do not mean to say that it is the only one. We shall show another aspect of the collective life, nearly opposite to the preceding one, but none the less real.

<sup>viii</sup>Of course this does not mean to say that the collective consciousness does not have distinctive characteristics of its own (on this point, see *Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives*, in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1898, pp. 273 ff.).

assembly is dissolved and when, finding ourselves alone again, we fall back to our ordinary level, we are then able to measure the height to which we have been raised above ourselves. History abounds in examples of this sort. It is enough to think of the night of the Fourth of August, 1789, when an assembly was suddenly led to an act of sacrifice and abnegation which each of its members had refused the day before, and at which they were all surprised the day after.<sup>ix</sup> This is why all parties political, economic or confessional, are careful to have periodical reunions where their members may revivify their common faith by manifesting it in common. To strengthen those sentiments which, if left to themselves, would soon weaken, it is sufficient to bring those who hold them together and to put them into closer and more active relations with one another. This is the explanation of the particular attitude of a man speaking to a crowd, at least if he has succeeded in entering into communion with it. His language has a grandiloquence that would be ridiculous in ordinary circumstances; his gestures show a certain domination; his very thought is impatient of all rules, and easily falls into all sorts of excesses. It is because he feels within him an abnormal over-supply of force which overflows and tries to burst out from him; sometimes he even has the feeling that he is dominated by a moral force which is greater than he and of which he is only the interpreter. It is by this trait that we are able to recognize what has often been called the demon of oratorical inspiration. Now this exceptional increase of force is something very real; it comes to him from the very group which he addresses. The sentiments provoked by his words come back to him, but enlarged and amplified, and to this degree they strengthen his own sentiment. The passionate energies he

arouses re-echo within him and quicken his vital tone. It is no longer a simple individual who speaks; it is a group incarnate and personified.

Besides these passing and intermittent states, there are other more durable ones, where this strengthening influence of society makes itself felt with greater consequences and frequently even with greater brilliancy. There are periods in history when, under the influence of some great collective shock, social interactions have become much more frequent and active. Men look for each other and assemble together more than ever. That general effervescence results which is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. Now this greater activity results in a general stimulation of individual forces. Men see more and differently now than in normal times. Changes are not merely of shades and degrees; men become different. The passions moving them are of such an intensity that they cannot be satisfied except by violent and unrestrained actions, actions of superhuman heroism or of bloody barbarism. This is what explains the Crusades,<sup>x</sup> for example, or many of the scenes, either sublime or savage, of the French Revolution.<sup>xi</sup> Under the influence of the general exaltation, we see the most mediocre and inoffensive bourgeois become either a hero or a butcher.<sup>xii</sup> And so clearly are all these mental processes the ones that are also at the root of religion that the individuals themselves have often pictured the pressure before which they thus gave way in a distinctly religious form. The Crusaders believed that they felt God present in the midst of them, enjoining them to go to the conquest of the Holy Land; Joan of Arc believed that she obeyed celestial voices.<sup>xiii</sup>

But it is not only in exceptional circumstances that this stimulating action of society makes itself felt; there is not, so to speak, a moment in our lives when some current of

<sup>ix</sup>This is proved by the length and passionate character of the debates where a legal form was given to the resolutions made in a moment of collective enthusiasm. In the clergy as in the nobility, more than one person called this celebrated night the dupe's night, or, with Rivarol, the St. Bartholomew of the estates (see Stoll, *Suggestion und Hypnotismus in de Völkerpsychologie*, 2nd ed., p. 618, n. 2).

<sup>x</sup>See Stoll, *op. cit.*, pp. 353 ff.

<sup>xi</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 619, 635.

<sup>xii</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 622 ff.

<sup>xiii</sup>The emotions of fear and sorrow are able to develop similarly and to become intensified under these same conditions. As we shall see, they correspond to quite another aspect of the religious life (Bk. III, ch. v).

energy does not come to us from without. The man who has done his duty finds, in the manifestations of every sort expressing the sympathy, esteem or affection which his fellows have for him, a feeling of comfort, of which he does not ordinarily take account, but which sustains him, none the less. The sentiments which society has for him raise the sentiments which he has for himself. Because he is in moral harmony with his comrades, he has more confidence, courage and boldness in action, just like the believer who thinks that he feels the regard of his god turned graciously towards him. It thus produces, as it were, a perpetual sustenance of our moral nature. Since this varies with a multitude of external circumstances, as our relations with the groups about us are more or less active and as these groups themselves vary, we cannot fail to feel that this moral support depends upon an external cause; but we do not perceive where this cause is nor what it is. So we ordinarily think of it under the form of a moral power which, though immanent in us, represents within us something not ourselves: this is the moral conscience, of which, by the way, men have never made even a slightly distinct representation except by the aid of religious symbols.

In addition to these free forces which are constantly coming to renew our own, there are others which are fixed in the methods and traditions which we employ. We speak a language that we did not make; we use instruments that we did not invent; we invoke rights that we did not found; a treasury of knowledge is transmitted to each generation that it did not gather itself, etc. It is to society that we owe these varied benefits of civilization, and if we do not ordinarily see the source from which we get them, we at least know that they are not our own work. Now it is these things that give man his own place among things; a man is a man only because he is civilized. So he could not escape the feeling that outside of him there are active causes from which he gets the characteristic attributes of his nature and which,

as benevolent powers, assist him, protect him and assure him of a privileged fate. And of course he must attribute to these powers a dignity corresponding to the great value of the good things he attributes to them.<sup>xiv</sup>

Thus the environment in which we live seems to us to be peopled with forces that are at once imperious and helpful, august and gracious, and with which we have relations. Since they exercise over us a pressure of which we are conscious, we are forced to localize them outside ourselves, just as we do for the objective causes of our sensations. But the sentiments which they inspire in us differ in nature from those which we have for simple visible objects. As long as these latter are reduced to their empirical characteristics as shown in ordinary experience, and as long as the religious imagination has not metamorphosed them, we entertain for them no feeling which resembles respect, and they contain within them nothing that is able to raise us outside ourselves. Therefore, the representations which express them appear to us to be very different from those aroused in us by collective influences. The two form two distinct and separate mental states in our consciousness, just as do the two forms of life to which they correspond. Consequently, we get the impression that we are in relations with two distinct sorts of reality and that a sharply drawn line of demarcation separates them from each other: on the one hand is the world of profane things, on the other, that of sacred things.

Also, in the present day just as much as in the past, we see society constantly creating sacred things out of ordinary ones. If it happens to fall in love with a man and if it thinks it has found in him the principal aspirations that move it, as well as the means of satisfying them, this man will be raised above the others and, as it were, deified. Opinion will invest him with a majesty exactly analogous to that protecting the gods. This is what has happened to so many sovereigns in whom their age had faith: if they were not made gods, they were at least regarded

<sup>xiv</sup>This is the other aspect of society which, while being imperative, appears at the same time to be good and gracious. It dominates us and assists us. If we have defined the social fact by the first of these characteristics rather than the second, it is because it is more readily observable, for it is translated into outward and visible signs; but we have never thought of denying the second (see our *Règles de la Méthode Sociologique*, preface to the second edition, p. xx, n. 1).

as direct representatives of the deity. And the fact that it is society alone which is the author of these varieties of apotheosis, is evident since it frequently chances to consecrate men thus who have no right to it from their own merit. The simple deference inspired by men invested with high social functions is not different in nature from religious respect. It is expressed by the same movements: a man keeps at a distance from a high personage; he approaches him only with precautions; in conversing with him, he uses other gestures and language than those used with ordinary mortals. The sentiment felt on these occasions is so closely related to the religious sentiment that many peoples have confounded the two. In order to explain the consideration accorded to princes, nobles and political chiefs, a sacred character has been attributed to them. In Melanesia and Polynesia, for example, it is said that an influential man has *mana*, and that his influence is due to this *mana*.<sup>xv</sup> However, it is evident that his situation is due solely to the importance attributed to him by public opinion. Thus the moral power conferred by opinion and that with which sacred beings are invested are at bottom of a single origin and made up of the same elements. That is why a single word is able to designate the two.

In addition to men, society also consecrates things, especially ideas. If a belief is unanimously shared by a people, then, for the reason which we pointed out above, it is forbidden to touch it, that is to say, to deny it or to contest it. Now the prohibition of criticism is an interdiction like the others and proves the presence of something sacred. Even to-day, howsoever great may be the liberty which we accord to others, a man who should totally deny progress or ridicule the human ideal to which modern societies are attached, would produce the effect of a sacrilege.

There is at least one principle which those the most devoted to the free examination of everything tend to place above discussion and to regard as untouchable, that is to say, as sacred: this is the very principle of free examination.

This aptitude of society for setting itself up as a god or for creating gods was never more apparent than during the first years of the French Revolution. At this time, in fact, under the influence of the general enthusiasm, things purely laïcal by nature were transformed by public opinion into sacred things: these were the Fatherland, Liberty, Reason.<sup>xvi</sup> A religion tended to become established which had its dogmas,<sup>xvii</sup> symbols,<sup>xviii</sup> altars<sup>xix</sup> and feasts.<sup>xx</sup> It was to these spontaneous aspirations that the cult of Reason and the Supreme Being attempted to give a sort of official satisfaction. It is true that this religious renovation had only an ephemeral duration. But that was because the patriotic enthusiasm which at first transported the masses soon relaxed.<sup>xxi</sup> The cause being gone, the effect could not remain. But this experiment, though short-lived, keeps all its sociological interest. It remains true that in one determined case we have seen society and its essential ideas become, directly and with no transfiguration of any sort, the object of a veritable cult.

All these facts allow us to catch glimpses of how the clan was able to awaken within its members the idea that outside of them there exist forces which dominate them and at the same time sustain them, that is to say in fine, religious forces: it is because there is no society with which the primitive is more directly and closely connected. The bonds uniting him to the tribe are much more lax and more feebly felt. Although this is not at all strange or foreign to him, it is with the people of his own clan that he has the greatest number of things in common; it is the action of this group that he feels the most directly; so it is

<sup>xv</sup>Codrington, *The Melanesians*, pp. 50, 103, 120. It is also generally thought that in the Polynesian languages, the word *mana* primitively had the sense of authority (see Tregear, *Maori Comparative Dictionary*, s.v.).

<sup>xvi</sup>See Albert Mathiez, *Les origines des cultes révolutionnaires* (1789–1792).

<sup>xvii</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>xviii</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 29, 32.

<sup>xix</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>xx</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>xxi</sup>See Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie et la Culte décadaire*, p. 36.

this also which, in preference to all others, should express itself in religious symbols. . . .

### III

One can readily conceive how, when arrived at this state of exaltation, a man does not recognize himself any longer. Feeling himself dominated and carried away by some sort of an external power which makes him think and act differently than in normal times, he naturally has the impression of being himself no longer. It seems to him that he has become a new being: the decorations he puts on and the masks that cover his face and figure materially in this interior transformation, and to a still greater extent, they aid in determining its nature. And as at the same time all his companions feel themselves transformed in the same way and express this sentiment by their cries, their gestures and their general attitude, everything is just as though he really were transported into a special world, entirely different from the one where he ordinarily lives, and into an environment filled with exceptionally intense forces that take hold of him and metamorphose him. How could such experiences as these, especially when they are repeated every day for weeks, fail to leave in him the conviction that there really exist two heterogeneous and mutually incomparable worlds? One is that where his daily life drags wearily along; but he cannot penetrate into the other without at once entering into relations with extraordinary powers that excite him to the point of frenzy. The first is the profane world, the second, that of sacred things.

So it is in the midst of these effervescent social environments and out of this effervescence itself that the religious idea seems to be born. The theory that this is really its origin is confirmed by the fact that in Australia the really religious activity is almost entirely confined to the moments when these assemblies are held. To be sure, there is no people among whom the great solemnities of the cult are not more or less periodic; but in the more advanced societies, there is not, so to speak, a day when some prayer or offering is not addressed to the gods and some ritual act is not performed. But in Australia, on the contrary, apart from the celebrations of the

clan and tribe, the time is nearly all filled with lay and profane occupations. Of course there are prohibitions that should be and are preserved even during these periods of temporal activity; it is never permissible to kill or eat freely of the totemic animal, at least in those parts where the interdiction has retained its original vigour; but almost no positive rites are then celebrated, and there are no ceremonies of any importance. These take place only in the midst of assembled groups. The religious life of the Australian passes through successive phases of complete lull and of superexcitation, and social life oscillates in the same rhythm. This puts clearly into evidence the bond uniting them to one another, but among the peoples called civilized, the relative continuity of the two blurs their relations. It might even be asked whether the violence of this contrast was not necessary to disengage the feeling of sacredness in its first form. By concentrating itself almost entirely in certain determined moments, the collective life has been able to attain its greatest intensity and efficacy, and consequently to give men a more active sentiment of the double existence they lead and of the double nature in which they participate. . . .

Now the totem is the flag of the clan. It is therefore natural that the impressions aroused by the clan in individual minds—impressions of dependence and of increased vitality—should fix themselves to the idea of the totem rather than that of the clan: for the clan is too complex a reality to be represented clearly in all its complex unity by such rudimentary intelligences. More than that, the primitive does not even see that these impressions come to him from the group. He does not know that the coming together of a number of men associated in the same life results in disengaging new energies, which transform each of them. All that he knows is that he is raised above himself and that he sees a different life from the one he ordinarily leads. However, he must connect these sensations to some external object as their cause. Now what does he see about him? On every side those things which appeal to his senses and strike his imagination are the numerous images of the totem. They are the waninga and the nurtunja, which are symbols of the sacred being. They are churinga and bull-roarers, upon which are generally carved combinations of lines having the same significance.

They are the decorations covering the different parts of his body, which are totemic marks. How could this image, repeated everywhere and in all sorts of forms, fail to stand out with exceptional relief in his mind? Placed thus in the centre of the scene, it becomes representative. The sentiments experienced fix themselves upon it, for it is the only concrete object upon which they can fix themselves. It continues to bring them to mind and to evoke them even after the assembly has dissolved, for it survives the assembly, being carved upon the instruments of the cult, upon the sides of rocks, upon bucklers, etc. By it, the emotions experienced are perpetually sustained and revived. Everything happens just as if they inspired them directly. It is still more natural to attribute them to it for, since they are common to the group, they can be associated only with something that is equally common to all. Now the totemic emblem is the only thing satisfying this condition. By definition, it is common to all. During the ceremony, it is the centre of all regards. While generations change, it remains the same; it is the permanent element of the social life. So it is from it that those mysterious forces seem to emanate with which men feel that they are related, and thus they have been led to represent these forces under the form of the animate or inanimate being whose name the clan bears.

When this point is once established, we are in a position to understand all that is essential in the totemic beliefs.

Since religious force is nothing other than the collective and anonymous force of the clan, and since this can be represented in the mind only in the form of the totem, the totemic emblem is like the visible body of the god. Therefore, it is from it that those kindly and dreadful actions seem to emanate, which the cult seeks to provoke or prevent; consequently, it is to it that the cult is addressed. This is the explanation of why it holds the first place in the series of sacred things.

But the clan, like every other sort of society, can live only in and through the individual consciousnesses that compose it. So if religious force, in so far as it is conceived as incorporated in the totemic emblem, appears to be outside of the individuals and to be endowed with a sort of transcendence over them, it, like the clan of which it is the symbol, can be realized only in and through them; in this sense, it is imminent in them and they necessarily represent it as such.

They feel it present and active within them, for it is this which raises them to a superior life. This is why men have believed that they contain within them a principle comparable to the one residing in the totem, and consequently, why they have attributed a sacred character to themselves, but one less marked than that of the emblem. It is because the emblem is the pre-eminent source of the religious life; the man participates in it only indirectly, as he is well aware; he takes into account the fact that the force that transports him into the world of sacred things is not inherent in him, but comes to him from the outside. . . .

But if this theory of totemism has enabled us to explain the most characteristic beliefs of this religion, it rests upon a fact not yet explained. When the idea of the totem, the emblem of the clan, is given, all the rest follows; but we must still investigate how this idea has been formed. This is a double question and may be subdivided as follows: What has led the clan to choose an emblem? and why have these emblems been borrowed from the animal and vegetable worlds, and particularly from the former?

That an emblem is useful as a rallying-centre for any sort of a group it is superfluous to point out. By expressing the social unity in a material form, it makes this more obvious to all, and for that very reason the use of emblematic symbols must have spread quickly when once thought of. But more than that, this idea should spontaneously arise out of the conditions of common life; for the emblem is not merely a convenient process for clarifying the sentiment society has of itself: it also serves to create this sentiment; it is one of its constituent elements.

In fact, if left to themselves, individual consciousnesses are closed to each other; they can communicate only by means of signs which express their internal states. If the communication established between them is to become a real communion, that is to say, a fusion of all particular sentiments into one common sentiment, the signs expressing them must themselves be fused into one single and unique resultant. It is the appearance of this that informs individuals that they are in harmony and makes them conscious of their moral unity. It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same



word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object that they become and feel themselves to be in unison. It is true that individual representations also cause reactions in the organism that are not without importance; however, they can be thought of apart from these physical reactions which accompany them or follow them, but which do not constitute them. But it is quite another matter with collective representations. They presuppose that minds act and react upon one another; they are the product of these actions and reactions which are themselves possible only through material intermediaries. These latter do not confine themselves to revealing the mental state with which they are associated; they aid in creating it. Individual minds cannot come in contact and communicate with each other except by coming out of themselves; but they cannot do this except by movements. So it is the homogeneity of these movements that gives the group consciousness of itself and consequently makes it exist. When this homogeneity is once established and these movements have once taken a stereotyped form, they serve to symbolize the corresponding representations. But they symbolize them only because they have aided in forming them.

Moreover, without symbols, social sentiments could have only a precarious existence. Though very strong as long as men are together and influence each other reciprocally, they exist only in the form of recollections after the assembly has ended, and when left to themselves, these become feebler and feebler; for since the group is now no longer present and active, individual temperaments easily regain the upper hand. The violent passions which may have been released in the heart of a crowd fall away and are extinguished when this is dissolved, and men ask themselves with astonishment how they could ever have been so carried away from their normal character. But if the movements by which these sentiments are expressed are connected with something that endures, the sentiments themselves become more durable. These other things are constantly bringing them to mind and arousing them; it is as though the cause which excited them in the first place continued to act. Thus these systems

of emblems, which are necessary if society is to become conscious of itself, are no less indispensable for assuring the continuation of this consciousness.

So we must refrain from regarding these symbols as simple artifices, as sorts of labels attached to representations already made, in order to make them more manageable: they are an integral part of them. Even the fact that collective sentiments are thus attached to things completely foreign to them is not purely conventional: it illustrates under a conventional form a real characteristic of social facts, that is, their transcendence over individual minds. In fact, it is known that social phenomena are born, not in individuals, but in the group. Whatever part we may take in their origin, each of us receives them from without.<sup>xxii</sup> So when we represent them to ourselves as emanating from a material object, we do not completely misunderstand their nature. Of course they do not come from the specific thing to which we connect them, but nevertheless, it is true that their origin is outside of us. If the moral force sustaining the believer does not come from the idol he adores or the emblem he venerates, still it is from outside of him, as he is well aware. The objectivity of its symbol only translates its eternalness.

Thus social life, in all its aspects and in every period of its history, is made possible only by a vast symbolism. The material emblems and figurative representations with which we are more especially concerned in our present study, are one form of this; but there are many others. Collective sentiments can just as well become incarnate in persons or formulæ: some formulæ are flags, while there are persons, either real or mythical, who are symbols. . . .

## CONCLUSION

As we have progressed, we have established the fact that the fundamental categories of thought, and consequently of science, are of religious origin. We have seen that the same is true for magic and consequently for the different processes which have issued from it. On the other hand, it

<sup>xxii</sup>On this point see *Règles de la méthode sociologique*, pp. 5 ff.

has long been known that up until a relatively advanced moment of evolution, moral and legal rules have been indistinguishable from ritual prescriptions. In summing up, then, it may be said that nearly all the great social institutions have been born in religion.<sup>xxiii</sup> Now in order that these principal aspects of the collective life may have commenced by being only varied aspects of the religious life, it is obviously necessary that the religious life be the eminent form and, as it were, the concentrated expression of the whole collective life. If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion.

Religious forces are therefore human forces, moral forces. It is true that since collective sentiments can become conscious of themselves only by fixing themselves upon external objects, they have not been able to take form without adopting some of their characteristics from other things: they have thus acquired a sort of physical nature; in this way they have come to mix themselves with the life of the material world, and then have considered themselves capable of explaining what passes there. But when they are considered only from this point of view and in this role, only their most superficial aspect is seen. In reality, the essential elements of which these collective sentiments are made have been borrowed by the understanding. It ordinarily seems that they should have a human character only when they are conceived under human forms,<sup>xxiv</sup> but even the most impersonal and the most anonymous are nothing else than objectified sentiments.

It is only by regarding religion from this angle that it is possible to see its real significance. If we stick closely to appearances, rites often give the effect of purely manual operations: they are anointings, washings, meals. To consecrate something, it is put in contact with a source of religious energy, just as to-day a body is put in contact with a source of heat or electricity to warm

or electrize it; the two processes employed are not essentially different. Thus understood, religious technique seems to be a sort of mystic mechanics. But these material manoeuvres are only the external envelope under which the mental operations are hidden. Finally, there is no question of exercising a physical constraint upon blind and, incidentally, imaginary forces, but rather of reaching individual consciousnesses of giving them a direction and of disciplining them. It is sometimes said that inferior religions are materialistic. Such an expression is inexact. All religions, even the crudest, are in a sense spiritualistic: for the powers they put in play are before all spiritual, and also their principal object is to act upon the moral life. Thus it is seen that whatever has been done in the name of religion cannot have been done in vain: for it is necessarily the society that did it, and it is humanity that has reaped the fruits. . . .

## II

Thus there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself. There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals, being closely united to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments; hence come ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes employed to attain these results. What essential difference is there between an assembly of Christians celebrating the principal dates of the life of Christ, or of Jews remembering the exodus from Egypt or the

<sup>xxiii</sup>Only one form of social activity has not yet been expressly attached to religion: that is economic activity. Sometimes processes that are derived from magic have, by that fact alone, an origin that is indirectly religious. Also, economic value is a sort of power or efficacy, and we know the religious origins of the idea of power. Also, richness can confer *mana*; therefore it has it. Hence it is seen that the ideas of economic value and of religious value are not without connection. But the question of the nature of these connections has not yet been studied.

<sup>xxiv</sup>It is for this reason that Frazer and even Preuss set impersonal religious forces outside of, or at least on the threshold of religion, to attach them to magic.

promulgation of the decalogue, and a reunion of citizens commemorating the promulgation of a new moral or legal system or some great event in the national life? . . .

In summing up, then, we must say that society is not at all the illogical or a-logical, incoherent and fantastic being which it has too often been considered. Quite on the contrary, the collective consciousness is the highest form of the psychic life, since it is the consciousness of the consciousnesses. Being placed outside of and above

individual and local contingencies, it sees things only in their permanent and essential aspects, which it crystallizes into communicable ideas. At the same time that it sees from above, it sees farther; at every moment of time, it embraces all known reality; that is why it alone can furnish the mind with the moulds which are applicable to the totality of things and which make it possible to think of them. It does not create these moulds artificially; it finds them within itself; it does nothing but become conscious of them. . . .

### Discussion Questions

1. Outline the two forms of solidarity discussed by Durkheim. What are the distinguishing features of each type of solidarity? What is the relationship between the two forms of solidarity and the division of labor? Do these concepts help explain the division of labor in your family of origin? In a current or previous place of employment? How so or why not? Be specific.

2. Discuss the various types of suicide that Durkheim delineates using specific examples. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the notion that different *types* of suicide prevail in “modern” as opposed to “traditional” societies? Give concrete examples.

3. Define, compare, and contrast Marx’s concept of alienation and Durkheim’s concept of anomie. How exactly do these concepts overlap? How are they different?

4. Discuss Durkheim’s notion of collective conscience. What does Durkheim mean

by saying that the collective conscience is *not* just a “sum” of individual consciousnesses? How does collective conscience compare to such notions as “group think” or “mob mentality”? Use concrete examples to explain.

5. Discuss specific moments of collective effervescence that you have experienced (e.g., concerts, church, etc.). What particular symbols and rituals were called up and used to arouse this social state?

6. Discuss Durkheim’s definition of religion as well as the sacred and profane, using concrete examples. What are the advantages and disadvantages of Durkheim’s definition of religion, both for understanding the essence of religion and for doing research on religion? How does Durkheim distinguish “religion” and “magic”? Do you agree or disagree with this distinction?