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## EMILE DURKHEIM

### *I. De la division du travail social*

*De la division du travail social*, Durkheim's doctoral thesis, is his first major book; it is also the one in which the influence of Auguste Comte is most obvious. The theme of Durkheimian thought, and consequently the theme of this first book, is the relation between individuals and the collectivity. The problem might be stated thus: How can a multiplicity of individuals make up a society? How can individuals achieve what is the condition of social existence, namely, a consensus?

Durkheim's answer to this central question is to set up a distinction between two forms of solidarity and organic solidarity, respectively.

Mechanical solidarity is, to use Durkheim's language, a solidarity of resemblance. The major characteristic of a society in which mechanical solidarity prevails is that the individuals differ from one another as little as possible. The individuals, the members of the same collectivity, resemble each other because they feel the same emotions, cherish the same values, and hold the same things sacred. The society is coherent because the individuals are not yet differentiated.

The opposite form of solidarity, so-called organic solidarity, is one in which consensus, or the coherent unity of the collectivity, results from or is expressed by differentiation.

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The opposite form of solidarity, so-called organic solidarity, is one in which consensus, or the coherent unity of the collectivity, results from or is expressed by differentiation.

The individuals are no longer similar, but different; and in a certain sense, which we shall examine more thoroughly, it is precisely because the individuals are different that consensus is achieved.

Why does Durkheim call solidarity based on, or resulting from, differentiation of the individuals, *organic*? The reason for this terminology is probably as follows. The parts of a living organism do not resemble each other; the organs of a living creature each perform a function, and it is precisely because each organ has its own function, because the heart and the lungs are altogether different from the brain, that they are equally indispensable to life.

In Durkheim's thought, the two forms of solidarity correspond to two extreme forms of social organization. The societies which in Durkheim's day were called primitive and which today are more likely to be called archaic (or societies without writing—incidentally, the change in terminology reflects a different attitude toward these societies) are characterized by the predominance of mechanical solidarity. The individuals of a clan are, so to speak, interchangeable. It follows from this—and this idea is essential to Durkheim's conception—that the individual does not come first, historically; the individual, the awareness of oneself as an individual, is born of historical development itself. In primitive societies each man is the same as the others; in the consciousness of each, feelings common to all, collective feelings, predominate in number and intensity.

The opposition between these two forms of solidarity is combined with the opposition between segmental societies and societies characterized by modern division of labor. One might say that a society with mechanical solidarity is also a segmental society; but actually the definition of these two notions is not exactly the same, and the point is worth dwelling on for a moment.

In Durkheim's terminology, a segment designates a social group into which the individuals are tightly incorporated. But a segment is also a group locally situated, relatively isolated from others, which leads its own life. The segment is characterized by a mechanical solidarity, a solidarity of

resemblance; but it is also characterized by separation from the outside world. The segment is self-sufficient, it has little communication with what is outside. By definition, so to speak, segmental organization is contradictory to those general phenomena of differentiation designated by the term *organic solidarity*. But, according to Durkheim, in certain societies which may have very advanced forms of economic division of labor, segmental structure may still persist in part.

The idea is expressed in a curious passage in the book we are analyzing:

It may very well happen that in a particular society a certain division of labor—and especially economic division of labor—may be highly developed, while the segmental type may still be rather pronounced. This certainly seems to be the case in England. Major industry, big business, appears to be as highly developed there as on the continent, while the honeycomb system is still very much in evidence, as witness both the autonomy of local life and the authority retained by tradition. [The symptomatic value of this last fact will be determined in the following chapter.]

The fact is that division of labor, being a derived and secondary phenomenon, as we have seen, occurs at the surface of social life, and this is especially true of economic division of labor. It is skin deep. Now, in every organism, superficial phenomena, by their very location, are much more accessible to the influence of external causes, even when the internal causes on which they depend are not generally modified. It suffices, therefore, that some circumstance or other arouse in a people a more intense need for material well-being, for economic division of labor to develop without any appreciable change in social structure. The spirit of imitation, contact with a more refined civilization, may produce this result. Thus it is that understanding, being the highest and therefore the most superficial part of consciousness, may be rather easily modified by external influences like education, without affecting the deepest layers of psychic life. In this way intelligences are created which are quite

sufficient to insure success, but which are without deep roots. Moreover, this type of talent is not transmitted by heredity.

This example proves that we must not decide a given society's position on the social ladder by the state of its civilization, especially its economic civilization; for the latter may be merely an imitation, a copy, and may overlie a social structure of an inferior kind. True, the case is exceptional; nevertheless it does occur.

Durkheim writes that England, although characterized by a highly developed modern industry and consequently an economic division of labor, has retained the segmental type, the honeycomb system, to a greater extent than some other societies in which, however, economic division of labor is less advanced. Where does Durkheim see the proof of this survival of segmental structure? In the continuance of local autonomies and in the force of tradition. The notion of segmental structure is not, therefore, identified with solidarity of resemblance. It implies the relative isolation, the self-sufficiency of the various elements, which are comparable to the rings of an earthworm. Thus one can imagine an entire society, spread out over a large space, which would be nothing more than a juxtaposition of segments, all alike, all autarchic. One can conceive of the juxtaposition of a large number of clans, or tribes, or regionally autonomous groups, perhaps even subject to a central authority, without the unity of resemblance of the segment being disturbed, without that differentiation of functions characteristic of organic solidarity operating on the level of the entire society.

In any case, remember that the division of labor which Durkheim is trying to understand and define is not to be confused with the one envisaged by economists. Differentiation of occupations and multiplication of industrial activities are an expression, as it were, of the social differentiation which Durkheim regards as taking priority. The origin of social differentiation is the disintegration of mechanical solidarity and of segmental structure.

These are the fundamental themes of the book. With these in mind, let us try to focus on some of the ideas which follow from this analysis and which constitute Durkheim's general theory. First of all, let us see what definition of the collective consciousness Durkheim gives at this period, because hence the concept of collective consciousness is of first importance.

Collective consciousness, as defined in this book, is simply "the body of beliefs and sentiments common to the average of the members of a society." Durkheim adds that the system of these beliefs and sentiments has a life of its own. The collective consciousness, whose existence depends on the sentiments and beliefs present in individual consciousness, is nevertheless separable, at least analytically, from individual consciousness; it evolves according to its own laws, it is not merely the expression or effect of individual consciousness.

The collective consciousness varies in extent and force from one society to another. In societies where mechanical solidarity predominates, the collective consciousness embraces the greater part of individual consciousness. The same idea may be expressed thus: in archaic societies, the fraction of individual existences governed by common sentiments is nearly coextensive with the total existence.

In societies of which differentiation of individuals is a characteristic, everyone is free to believe, to desire, and to act according to his own preferences in a large number of circumstances. In societies with mechanical solidarity, on the other hand, the greater part of existence is governed by social imperatives and interdicts. At this period in Durkheim's thought, the adjective *social* means merely that these prohibitions and imperatives are imposed on the average, the majority of the members of the group; that they originate with the group, and not with the individual, and that the individual submits to these imperatives and prohibitions as to a higher power.

The force of this collective consciousness coincides with its extent. In primitive societies, not only does the collective consciousness embrace the greater part of individual exist-

ence, but the sentiments experienced in common have an extreme violence which is manifested in the severity of the punishments inflicted on those who violate the prohibitions. The stronger the collective consciousness, the livelier the indignation against the crime, that is, against the violation of the social imperative. Finally, the collective consciousness is also particularized. Each of the acts of social existence, especially religious rites, is characterized by an extreme precision. It is *the details* of what must be done and what must be thought which are imposed by the collective consciousness.

On the other hand, Durkheim believes he sees in organic solidarity a reduction of the sphere of existence embraced by the collective consciousness, a weakening of collective reactions against violation of prohibitions, and above all a greater margin for the individual interpretation of social imperatives.

Let us take a simple illustration. What justice demands in a primitive society will be determined by collective sentiments with an extreme precision. What justice demands in societies where division of labor is advanced is formulated by the collective consciousness only in an abstract and, so to speak, universal manner. In the first instance, justice means that a given individual receives a given thing; in the second, what justice demands is that "each receive his due." But of what does this "due" consist? Of many possible things, no one of which is in any absolute sense free from doubt or unequivocally fixed.

From this sort of analysis Durkheim derived an idea which he maintained all his life, an idea which is, as it were, at the center of his whole sociology, namely, that the individual is born of society, and not society of individuals.

Stated this way, the formula has a paradoxical sound, and often Durkheim himself expresses the idea just as paradoxically as I have done. But for the moment I am trying to understand Durkheim, not to criticize him. Reconstructing Durkheim's thought, I would say that the primacy of society over the individual has at least two meanings which at bottom are in no way paradoxical.

The first meaning is the one I indicated above: the historical precedence of societies in which the individuals resemble one another, and are so to speak lost in the whole, over societies whose members have acquired both awareness of their individuality and the capacity to express it.

Collectivist societies, societies in which everyone resembles everyone else, come first in time. From this historical priority there arises a logical priority in the explanation of social phenomena. Many economists will explain the division of labor by the advantage that individuals discover in dividing the tasks among themselves so as to increase the output of the collectivity. But this explanation in terms of the rationality of individual conduct strikes Durkheim as a reversal of the true order. To say that men divided the work among themselves, and assigned everyone his own job, in order to increase the efficacy of the collective output is to assume that individuals are different from one another and aware of their difference *before* social differentiation. If Durkheim's historical vision is true, this awareness of individuality could not exist before organic solidarity, before division of labor. Therefore, the rational pursuit of an increased output cannot explain social differentiation, since this pursuit presupposes that very social differentiation which it should explain.<sup>1</sup>

We have here, I think, the outline of what is to be one of Durkheim's central ideas throughout his career—the idea with which he defines sociology—namely, the priority of the whole over the parts, or again, the irreducibility of the social entity to the sum of its elements, the explanation of the elements by the entity and not of the entity by the elements.

In his study of the division of labor, Durkheim discovered two essential ideas: the historical priority of societies in which individual consciousness is entirely external to itself, and the necessity of explaining individual phenomena by the state of the collectivity, and not the state of the collectivity by individual phenomena.

Once again, the phenomenon Durkheim is trying to explain, the division of labor, differs from what the econo-

mists understand by the same concept. The division of labor Durkheim is talking about is a structure of the society as a whole, of which technical or economic division of labor is merely an expression.

Having stated these fundamental ideas, I shall now turn to the second stage of the analysis, namely how to study the division of labor which we have defined. Durkheim's answer to this question of method is as follows. To study a social phenomenon scientifically, one must study it objectively, that is, from the outside; one must find the method by which states of awareness not directly apprehensible may be recognized and understood. These symptoms or expressions of the phenomena of consciousness are, in *De la division du travail social*, found in legal phenomena. In a tentative and perhaps rather oversimplified manner, Durkheim distinguishes two kinds of law, each of which is characteristic of one of the types of solidarity: *repressive* law, which punishes misdeeds or crimes, and *restitutive* or cooperative law, whose essence is not to punish breaches of social rules but to restore things to order when a misdeed has been committed or to organize cooperation among the individuals.

Repressive law is, as it were, the index of the collective consciousness in societies with mechanical solidarity, since by the very fact that it multiplies punishments it reveals the force of common sentiments, their extent, and their particularization. The more widespread, strong, and particularized the collective conscience, the more crimes there will be, crime being defined simply as the violation of an imperative or prohibition.

Let us pause over this point for a moment. This definition of crime is typically sociological, in Durkheim's sense of the word. A crime, in the sociological sense of the term, is simply an act prohibited by the collective consciousness. That this act seems innocent in the eyes of observers situated several centuries after the event, or belonging to a different society, is of no importance. In a sociological study, crime can only be defined from the outside and in terms of the state of the collective consciousness of the so-

ciety in question. This is the prototype of the objective, and therefore of the relativist, definition of crime. Sociologically, to call someone a criminal does not imply that we consider him guilty in relation to God or to our own conception of justice. The criminal is simply the man in a society who has refused to obey the laws of the city. In this sense, it was probably just to regard Socrates as a criminal. Of course, if one carries this idea to its conclusion, it becomes either commonplace or shocking; but Durkheim himself did not do so. The sociological definition of crime leads logically to a complete relativism which is easy to conceive in the abstract but which no one believes in, perhaps not even those who profess it.

In any case, having outlined a theory of crime, Durkheim also offers us a theory of punishment. He dismisses with a certain contempt the classic interpretations whereby the purpose of punishment is to prevent the repetition of the guilty act. According to him, the purpose and meaning of punishment is not to frighten—deter, as we say today. The purpose of punishment is to satisfy the common consciousness. The act committed by one of the members of the collectivity has offended the collective consciousness, which demands reparation, and the punishment of the guilty is the reparation offered to the feelings of all.

Durkheim considers this theory of punishment more satisfactory than the rationalist interpretation of punishment as deterrence. It is probable that in sociological terms he is right to a great extent. But we must not overlook the fact that if this is so, if punishment is above all a reparation offered to the collective consciousness, the prestige of justice and the authority of punishments are not enhanced. At this point Pareto's cynicism would certainly intervene: he would say that Durkheim is right, that many punishments are merely a kind of vengeance exercised by the collective consciousness at the expense of undisciplined individuals. But, he would add, we must not say so, for how are we to maintain respect for justice if it is merely a tribute offered to the prejudices of an arbitrary or irrational society?

The second kind of law is the one Durkheim generally refers to as restitutive. The point is no longer to punish but to reestablish the state of things as it should have been in accordance with justice. A man who has not settled his debt must pay it. But this restitutive law, of which commercial law is an example, is not the only form of law characteristic of societies with organic solidarity. At any rate, we must understand restitutive law in a very wide sense whereby it includes all aspects of legislation aimed at bringing about cooperation among individuals. Administrative law and constitutional law belong by the same token to the category of cooperative legislation. They are less the expression of the sentiments common to a collectivity than the organization of regular and ordered coexistence among individuals who are already differentiated.

Following this line of thought, we might suppose that we are about to encounter an idea which played a large part in the sociology of Herbert Spencer and the theories of the economists, the idea that a modern society is essentially based on contract, on agreements freely concluded by individuals. Were this the case, the Durkheimian vision would in a sense accord with the classical formula "from statute to contract," or from a society governed by collective imperatives to a society where common order is created by the free decisions of individuals.

But such is not Durkheim's idea. For him, modern society is not based on contract, any more than division of labor is explained by the rational decision of individuals to increase the common output by dividing the tasks among themselves. If modern society were a "contractualist" society, then it would be explained in terms of individual conduct, and it is precisely the opposite that Durkheim wishes to demonstrate.

While opposing "contractualists" like Spencer, as well as the economists, Durkheim does not deny that in modern societies an increasing role is indeed played by contracts freely concluded among individuals. But this contractual element is a derivative of the structure of the society and, one might even say, a derivative of the state of the collec-

tive consciousness in modern society. In order for an ever wider sphere to exist in which individuals may freely reach agreements among themselves, society must first have a legal structure which authorizes independent decisions on the part of individuals. In other words, inter-individual contracts occur within a social context which is not determined by the individuals themselves. It is the division of labor by differentiation which is the original condition for the existence of a sphere of contract. Which brings us back to the idea I indicated above: the priority of the structure over the individual, the priority of the social type over individual phenomena. Contracts are concluded between individuals, but the conditions and rules according to which these contracts are concluded are determined by a legislation which, in turn, expresses the conception shared by the whole society of the just and the unjust, the permissible and the prohibited.

The society in which the organic type of solidarity prevails is not therefore defined by the substitution of contract for community. Nor is modern society defined by the substitution of the industrial type for the military type, to adopt Spencer's antithesis. Modern society is defined first and foremost by the phenomenon of social differentiation, of which contractualism is the result and expression. Once again, therefore, when economists or sociologists explain modern society on the basis of the contract, they are reversing both the historical and the logical order. It is in terms of the society as a whole that we understand not only what individuals are but how and why they are able to agree freely.

This brings us to the third stage of our analysis. We have considered first the themes, then the methods; now we must look for the cause of the phenomenon we are studying, the cause of organic solidarity or of social differentiation seen as the structural characteristic of modern societies.

Before indicating the answer Durkheim gives to the question, I should like to insert a parenthetical comment. It is not self-evident that Durkheim is right in stating the problem in the terms in which he does, namely: what is the

cause of the growth of organic solidarity or of social differentiation? What he has done is, essentially, to analyze certain characteristics of modern societies. It is not evident a priori, and it may even be unlikely, that one can indeed find *the* cause of a phenomenon which is not simple and isolable but which is rather an aspect of the whole of society. Durkheim, however, wants to determine *the* cause of the phenomenon he has analyzed, the growth of division of labor in modern societies.

As we have seen, we are dealing here with an essentially social phenomenon. When the phenomenon to be explained is essentially social, the cause, in accordance with the principle of homogeneity of cause and effect, must also be social. Thus we eliminate the individualist explanation. Curiously, Durkheim eliminates an explanation which Comte had also considered and eliminated, i.e., the explanation whereby the essential factor in social growth was held to be ennui, or the effort to overcome or avoid ennui. He also dismisses the search for happiness as an explanation, for, he says, nothing proves that men in modern societies are happier than men in archaic societies. (I think he is absolutely right on this point.) The only surprising thing is that he considers it necessary (though perhaps it was necessary at the time) to devote so many pages to proving that social differentiation cannot be explained by the search for pleasure or the pursuit of happiness.

It is true, he says, that pleasures are more numerous and more subtle in modern societies, but this differentiation of pleasures is the result of social differentiation, and not its cause. As for happiness, no one is in a position to say that we are happier than those who came before us. At this time Durkheim was already impressed by the phenomenon of suicide. The best proof, he writes, that happiness does not increase with the advance of modern society is the frequency of suicide. He proposes that in modern societies suicides are more numerous than in the societies of the past. Let us add that due to the lack of statistics on suicides in early societies we cannot be absolutely sure on this point.

Thus, division of labor cannot be explained by ennui or by the pursuit of happiness or by the increase of pleasures, by the desire to increase the output of collective labor. Division of labor, being a social phenomenon, can only be explained by another social phenomenon, and this other social phenomenon is a combination of the volume, the material density, and the moral density of the society.

The volume of a society is simply the number of individuals belonging to a given collectivity. But volume alone is not the cause of social differentiation. Imagine a large society inhabiting a vast surface area but resulting from a juxtaposition of segments (e.g., the uniting of a great number of tribes, each of which retains its former structure); volume alone will not give rise to differentiation in it. In order for volume—i.e., increase in number—to bring about differentiation, there must also be both material and moral density. Density in the material sense is the number of individuals on a given ground surface. Moral density, it seems to me, is roughly the intensity of communication between individuals, the intensity of intercourse. The more communication there is between individuals, the more they work together, the more trade or competition they have with one another, the greater the density. Put these two phenomena—volume and material and moral density—together, and social differentiation will result.

Why? Durkheim invokes a concept made fashionable by Darwin in the second half of the nineteenth century: the struggle for survival. Why does the increasing intensity of intercourse between individuals, itself created by material density, produce social differentiation? Because the more individuals there are trying to live together, the more intense the struggle for survival. Social differentiation is, so to speak, the peaceful solution to the struggle for survival. Instead of some being eliminated so that others may survive, as in the animal kingdom, social differentiation enables a greater number of individuals to survive by differentiation. Each man ceases to be in competition with all, each man is only in competition with a few of his fellows, each man is in a position to occupy his place, to play his role,



to perform his function. There is no need to eliminate the majority of individuals once they are no longer alike but different, each contributing in his own peculiar way to the survival of all.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of explanation is in keeping with what Durkheim considers a rule of the sociological method: the explanation of a social phenomenon by another social phenomenon, the explanation of a mass phenomenon by another mass phenomenon, rather than the explanation of a social phenomenon by individual phenomena.

In conclusion, let us summarize briefly the essential ideas of this necessarily concise study. Social differentiation, a phenomenon characteristic of modern societies, is the formative condition of individual liberty. Only in a society where the collective consciousness has lost part of its overpowering rigidity can the individual enjoy a certain autonomy of judgment and action. In this individualist society, the major problem is to maintain that minimum of collective consciousness without which organic solidarity would lead to social disintegration.

The philosophical idea which underlies the whole theory might be summarized as follows: the individual is the expression of the collectivity itself. The individuals in mechanical solidarities are in a sense interchangeable; in an archaic society it would be out of the question to call the individual "the most irreplaceable of beings," as Gide has put it. Even when we come to a society in which each man is willing and able to be the most irreplaceable of beings, the individual is still the expression of the collectivity. It is the structure of the collectivity that imposes on each man his peculiar responsibility. Finally, even in the society which authorizes each man to be himself and know himself, there is more collective consciousness present in the individual consciousness than we imagine. The society of organic differentiation could not endure if there were not, outside or above the contractual realm, collective imperatives and prohibitions, collective values and things held sacred to bind individuals to the social entity.

## II. *Le Suicide*

THE BOOK Durkheim devoted to the problem of suicide is related in various ways to his study of the division of labor. On the whole, Durkheim approves of the phenomenon of the organic division of labor. He sees it as a normal and generally speaking happy development in human societies. He approves of the differentiation of jobs, the variability and differentiation of individuals, the decline in the authority of tradition, the expanding domain of reason, the allowance for individual initiative. However, he also notes that the individual is not necessarily any more satisfied with his lot in modern societies. Durkheim is, incidentally, struck by the increase in the number of suicides as an expression and proof of certain possibly pathological traits in the contemporary organization of communal life.

The last part of the book devoted to the division of labor contains an analysis of these pathological traits. Durkheim is already using the term *anomie*—absence of norms or disintegration of norms—a concept which is to play a dominant role in his study of suicide. He reviews certain pathological phenomena: economic crisis, nonadjustment of workers to their jobs, the violence of the claims which individuals lodge against the collectivity. Insofar as modern societies are based on differentiation, it becomes indispensable that every

### III. *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse (1)*

THE FIRST QUESTION that arises when one tries to draw practical conclusions from Durkheim's study of suicide is that of the *normal* or *pathological* character of the phenomenon under consideration. As I have indicated, Durkheim regards crime as a socially normal phenomenon. This does not mean that criminals are not often psychically abnormal, or that crime should not be condemned and punished, but simply that in every society a certain number of crimes are committed and that consequently, if by normal we mean what happens regularly, crime is not a pathological phenomenon. Similarly, a certain suicide rate may be regarded as normal. Durkheim then goes on to decide, perhaps without quite conclusive demonstration, that the increase in the suicide rate in modern society is pathological, or, rather, that the current suicide rate reveals certain pathological traits in modern society.

Modern society is characterized by social differentiation, organic solidarity, density of population, intensity of communications and of the struggle for survival. All these phenomena are related to the essence of modern society and as such should not be regarded as abnormal.

But at the end of *De la division du travail social*, as at the end of *Le Suicide*, Durkheim indicates that modern

societies do present certain pathological symptoms—above all, insufficient integration of the individual into the collectivity. The type of suicide that in this respect most engages Durkheim's attention is the type he has called anomic, the type corresponding to an increase in the suicide rate in periods of economic crisis as well as in periods of prosperity, i.e., whenever there occurs an "exaggeration" of activity, an amplification of the intercourse and competition which are inseparable from the society in which we live but which beyond a certain threshold become pathological. Hence the question Durkheim raises at the end of his book: how can reintegration of the individual into the collectivity be effected? He considers in turn the family group, the religious group, and the political group (particularly the state), and tries to demonstrate that none of these three groups provides a social context that would give the individual security while subjecting him to the demands of solidarity.

He dismisses reintegration into the family group with two kinds of arguments. In the first place, the suicide rate rises as rapidly in married people as in single people, which indicates that the family group no longer offers protection against the suicidogenic impulse or that the rate of protection given by marriage does not rise. Thus it would be useless to count on the family alone to provide for the individual a milieu both close to him and capable of imposing discipline on him. Moreover, the functions of the family are declining in modern society. The family is more and more limited; its economic role is more and more curtailed. It is not the family which will serve as intermediary between the individual and the collectivity.

The state or the political grouping is too far from the individual, too abstract, too purely authoritative to offer the context necessary for integration.

Religion too, according to Durkheim, is unable to do away with *anomie*. We cannot expect religion to offer the remedies necessary to cure the pathological type of suicide. Why not? Essentially the reason is this. Durkheim's fundamental requirement for the group which is to be the means

of reintegration is discipline. Individuals must consent to limit their desires, to obey imperatives that both fix the objectives they may set themselves and indicate the means they may rightly use. But in modern societies religions present an increasingly abstract, intellectual character; in a certain sense they are being purified, they are nobler, but they have partially lost their function of social constraint. They appeal to individuals to transcend their passions, to live according to spiritual law, but they are no longer capable of specifying the obligations or rules which man should obey in his secular life. Modern religions, according to Durkheim, are no longer schools of discipline to the degree they were in the past. They have little authority over morals in action.

Therefore Durkheim's conclusion that the only social group that might foster the integration of individuals in the collectivity is the professional organization, or, to use his own term, the "corporation."

In the preface to the second edition of *De la division du travail social*, Durkheim speaks at length of corporations as institutions which are considered anachronistic today but which actually meet the needs of the present order. Generally speaking, by corporations he means professional organizations which would apparently include employers and employees, which would be close enough to the individual to constitute schools of discipline and far enough above him to enjoy prestige and authority. Finally, being professional organizations, corporations would correspond to the major characteristic of modern societies in which economic activity prevails.

I shall return later to this conception of corporations, which might be called the Durkheimian version of socialism; it has had the ill fortune to be rejected by socialists and liberals alike, with the result that it is condemned to remain an academic solution.

For the moment let us take from this discussion of the pathological character of current suicide rates and the search for therapy an idea that for me is central to Durkheim's philosophy. According to Durkheim, man when left

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to himself is motivated by unlimited desires. Individual man resembles the creature around whom Hobbes constructed his theory: he always wants more than he has, and he is always disappointed in the satisfactions he finds in a difficult existence. Since individual man is a man of desires, the first necessity of morality and of society is discipline. Man needs to be disciplined by a superior force which must have two characteristics: it must be commanding and it must be lovable. This force which at once commands and attracts can, according to Durkheim, only be society itself.

Before turning to *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, I should like to take up the three points on which discussion regarding Durkheim's thesis on suicide has focused.

The first point concerns the value of statistics. Statistics on suicide are inevitably based on small numbers, because, happily, only a small number of persons deliberately take their own lives, even in societies with organic solidarity. Statistical correlations are established through relatively slight differences in the suicide rate. If one is a doctor, or if one believes in the individual-psychological interpretation of suicide, one can always try to prove that variations in the suicide rate are meaningless in the majority of cases because of errors in the statistics.

There are at least two incontestable sources of error. The first is that more often than not suicides are known only through the declarations of families. Certain suicides are known because the very circumstances of the desperate act are witnessed by others; but a good number of suicides are committed under conditions such that the authorities know of these voluntary deaths only through the declarations of families. Hence it may be argued that the percentage of misrepresented suicides varies with the social milieu, the times, and the circumstances.

The second source of uncertainty is the frequency of unsuccessful suicides, attempted suicides. Durkheim had not studied this problem, which is extraordinarily complex; a

psychosocial study of each case is required to determine whether the intention to die was authentic or not.

The second point of discussion concerns the validity of the correlations established by Durkheim. To give you an idea of what is involved here, I need only refer to a classic thesis of Durkheim's, that Protestants commit suicide more often than Catholics because the Catholic religion is a greater integrating force than the Protestant religion. This thesis was based on German statistics taken in regions of mixed religion. It seems convincing until we ask ourselves whether by chance the Catholics live in agricultural regions and the Protestants in the towns; for if by chance the two religious groups correspond to populations having different ways of life, the thesis regarding the integrative value of the religions would be cast into doubt.

The establishment of correlations between the suicide rate and a factor such as religion requires a statistical demonstration that there are no differential factors other than religion. In a large number of cases, of course, one does not arrive at an incontestable result. The religious factor is difficult to isolate. Populations that live close to one another and are of different religions have also, more often than not, different ways of life and different professional activities.

It should not be forgotten that causal analysis as Durkheim practiced it by working from suicide statistics bears witness to an intuition that can truly be called inspired. He did not have the mathematical training of the sociologists of today, and the methods he employed often seem simple and crude in comparison with the subtleties of modern methods. Nevertheless, in this field Durkheim remains an impressive pioneer, worthy of admiration.

The third point of discussion and the most interesting from the theoretical point of view is the relation between the sociological and the psychological interpretations. Psychologists and sociologists are agreed on one thing: the majority of those who take their own lives have a nervous or psychic constitution which, though not necessarily abnormal, is at least fragile, vulnerable. These people dwell at

the outer limits of normality. More simply, many of those who kill themselves are in one sense or another neuropaths. They belong either to the anxious type or to the cyclothymic type. Durkheim himself had no objections to admitting this. But he was quick to add that there are a great many neuropaths who do not kill themselves, that the neuropathic character merely constitutes favorable soil, a favorable circumstance for the suicidogenic impulse.

I here quote from Durkheim the passage that seems to me most characteristic of his manner of stating the problem:

We can now form a more precise idea of the role of individual factors in the genesis of suicide. If in the same social milieu—for example, in the same religious community, the same body of troops, or the same profession—certain individuals are struck and not others, it is undoubtedly, at least generally speaking, because their mental constitution, as nature and events have made it, offers less resistance to the suicidogenic impulse. But though these conditions may help to determine the particular subjects in which this impulse is embodied, neither its distinctive characteristics nor its intensity depends on them. It is not because there are so many neuropaths in a social group that the annual number of suicides is so high. Neuropathy simply determines that some will give way rather than others. Here is the great difference that separates the clinician's point of view and the sociologist's. The former is confronted by particular cases isolated from one another. He observes that very often the victim is either a nervous type or an alcoholic, and he ascribes his action to one or the other of these psychopathic states. In one sense he is right, for if the subject committed suicide rather than his neighbors, it is frequently for this particular reason. But this is not the general reason why people commit suicide, or why in each society a certain number of people commit suicide in a determined period of time.

What is ambiguous in a passage like this is the expression *suicidogenic impulse*. This concept seems to imply that

there is properly speaking a social force, a collective force emanating from the group as a whole, which drives individuals to suicide. But neither individual facts directly observed nor statistical facts force us to any such conclusion. Suicide rates can be explained by the percentage of nervous or anxious people in a given society, or by the increment to suicide exerted on the nervous and anxious people in a given society. There are many anxious people who do not commit suicide, and it is understandable that, depending on professional status, political circumstances, or family status, anxious people should commit suicide more or less frequently.

In other words, nothing obliges us to regard a suicidogenic impulse as an objective reality, a determining cause. The statistical data may result from the combined influence of psychological or psychopathological facts and social circumstances, the social factors helping to increase either the number of the psychically unbalanced or the number of unbalanced persons who take their own lives.

The danger in the Durkheimian interpretation and the Durkheimian vocabulary is that of substituting for a positive interpretation, which readily combines individual and collective factors, a sort of mythical concretization of the social factors, the latter being transfigured, so to speak, into a supra-individual force that chooses its victims from among the individuals.

We now come to Durkheim's third major book, certainly the most important of the three: *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. It is the most important because it is the most profound, the most original; it is also, I think, the one in which Durkheim's inspiration is most clearly evident.

The book is devoted to elaborating a general theory of religion derived from an analysis of the simplest, most primitive religious institutions. This statement in itself suggests one of Durkheim's leading ideas, that it is legitimate and possible to base a valid theory of higher religions on a study of the primitive forms of religion. In other words, *totemism reveals the essence of religion*.

This last sentence is mine, not Durkheim's, but it is faithful, as I hope to show, to Durkheim's underlying thought. All the conclusions which Durkheim draws from his study of totemism presuppose the principle I have just formulated: that one can grasp the essence of a social phenomenon by observing its most elementary forms.

There is another reason why the study of totemism has a decisive significance in the Durkheimian system of thought: here again we meet the central theme not only of Durkheim but of all three sociologists we are studying. In one manner or another their common theme is the relation between science and religion.

In Durkheim's eyes science holds the supreme intellectual and moral authority in present-day societies. Our societies are individualist and rationalist. One can transcend science, but one cannot ignore it or challenge its teachings. We have also seen that it is society itself which determines, indeed favors, the growth of individualism and rationalism. Every society needs common beliefs, but apparently these beliefs can no longer be provided by traditional religion, since religion does not meet the requirements of the scientific spirit. There is a solution, which Durkheim finds simple and, if I may use the word, miraculous; it is that science itself reveals that religion is, at bottom, merely the transfiguration of society.

If it should be demonstrated that throughout history men have never worshipped any other reality, whether in the form of the totem or of God, than the collective social reality transfigured by faith, we would immediately have a solution to the paradox, a way out of the impasse. If this were so, the science of religion would reveal the possibility of reconstructing the beliefs necessary to consensus. Not that science alone is capable of creating the collective faith; but science would allow us hope that, as Bergson put it, the society of the future will still be capable of producing gods, since all the gods of the past have never been anything but society transfigured.

In this sense, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* represents Durkheim's solution to the antithesis

between science and religion. Science, by discovering the underlying reality of all religion, does not re-create a religion, but it gives us confidence in society's capacity to provide itself in every age with whatever gods it needs. The exact expression employed by Durkheim is: "Religious interests are merely the symbolic form of social and moral interests."

Straining the analogy somewhat perhaps, I would be inclined to say that Durkheim's book on the elementary forms of religious life represents in his work the equivalent of the *Système de politique positive* in the work of Auguste Comte. Not that Durkheim describes a religion of society in the detailed way in which Comte described a religion of humanity. At a certain point in his book, Durkheim says explicitly that Comte was wrong to believe that an individual could make a religion to order. Precisely if religion is a collective creation, it would be contrary to the theory to suppose that a sociologist could create a religion single-handed. Durkheim did not wish to create a religion in the manner of Comte; but insofar as he wished to demonstrate that the object of religion is none other than the transfiguration of society, he laid a foundation comparable to the one Comte had given to the religion of the future when he asserted that humanity, having killed transcendent gods, would love itself or at least would love what was best in itself under the name of humanity.

*Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* may be considered from three points of view because it brings together three kinds of studies. It contains a description and a detailed analysis of the clan system and of totemism in certain Australian tribes, with allusions to tribes of America. Second, it contains a theory of the essence of religion drawn from a study of Australian totemism. Finally, it outlines a sociological interpretation of the forms of human thought, an attempt to explain categories in terms of social contexts; an introduction, therefore, to what is now referred to as the sociology of knowledge.

Of these three themes it is the first, the descriptive study of the clan system and totemism, which occupies the most

space; but it is the theme I shall discuss most briefly. It would be almost impossible to summarize the description of the clan and totemic system in a few words.

What concerns us here is the second theme, the general theory of religions derived from the study of totemism. Durkheim's method in this book is the same as in the earlier books. The first step is a definition of the phenomenon, religion. The second is a refutation of theories that differ from the author's. The third is a demonstration of the essentially social nature of religions.

The definition of the religious phenomenon adopted by Durkheim is as follows. The essence of religion is to establish a division of the world into two kinds of phenomena, the sacred and the profane. The essence of religion is not, therefore, belief in a transcendent god; there are religions, even higher religions, without gods; Buddhism, or at least a majority of the schools of Buddhism, does not profess faith in a personal and transcendent god. Nor is religion defined by the notion of mystery or of the supernatural. Notions of this kind can only be recent; there is no supernatural except in relation to the natural; but to have a clear idea of the natural, one must think in a positive and scientific manner. The notion of the supernatural cannot precede the notion, itself recent, of a natural order.

What constitutes the category of the religious is the bipartite division of the world into what is profane and what is sacred. The sacred consists of a body of things, beliefs and rites. When a number of sacred things maintain relations of coordination and subordination with one another so as to form a system of the same kind, this body of corresponding beliefs and rites constitutes a religion. Religion hence presupposes first the sacred; next, the organization of the beliefs regarding the sacred into a group; finally, rites or practices which proceed in a more or less logical manner from the body of beliefs.

The definition of religion at which Durkheim arrives is: "A religion is an interdependent system of beliefs and practices regarding things which are sacred, that is to say, apart, forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite all those who

follow them in a single moral community called a church." The concept of church is added to the concept of the sacred and to the system of beliefs in order to differentiate religion from magic, which does not necessarily involve the consensus of the faithful in one church.

The second step of the study consists in dismissing interpretations contrary to those Durkheim is about to offer. The two interpretations which he seeks to refute in the first part of the book are *animism* and *naturism*.

Reduced to their simplest elements, these two interpretations are as follows. In animism, religious beliefs are held to be beliefs in spirits, these spirits being the transfiguration of the experience men have of their twofold nature of body and soul. As for naturism, it amounts to stating that men worship transfigured natural forces.

The exposition and refutation of these two doctrines is rather long, but I should like to indicate immediately what I believe is the idea underlying the double refutation. Whether one adopts the animist or the naturist interpretation, Durkheim says, in either case one ends by rescinding its object. To love spirits whose unreality one affirms, or to love natural forces transfigured merely by man's fear—in either case, Durkheim says, religion would amount to a kind of collective hallucination. The explanation of religion which Durkheim is about to provide amounts, according to him, to saving the reality of religion. For if man worships society transfigured, he worships an authentic reality, real forces, for what, he asks, is more real than the forces of the collectivity itself?

Religion is too permanent, too profound an experience not to correspond to a true reality; and if this true reality is not God, then it must be the reality, so to speak, immediately below God, namely, society. (I need scarcely add that "immediately below God" is not Durkheim's expression but mine.)

The aim of Durkheim's theory of religion is to establish the reality of the object of faith without accepting the intellectual content of traditional religions. Traditional religions are doomed in his eyes by the development of scien-

tific rationalism, but it will save what it seems to be destroying by showing that in the last analysis men have never worshipped anything other than their own society.

A few words more on the two theories, the animist and the naturalist, which Durkheim dismisses. He is referring to Tylor's (and Spencer's) theory, which was fashionable in his day. This theory began with the phenomenon of the dream. In dreams men see themselves where they are not; thus they conceive, as it were, a double of themselves, a double of the body, and it is easy for them to imagine that at the moment of death this double detaches itself and becomes a floating spirit, a good or bad genie. According to this interpretation, primitive men have difficulty distinguishing the animate from the inanimate. As a result, they lodge, so to speak, the souls of the dead, the floating spirits, in this or that reality. Thus there arises the cult of the tutelary spirit and of ancestors. Beginning with the quality of body and soul conceived in the dream, primitive religions pollulate with spirits, as it were, existing and acting around us, beneficent or formidable.

Durkheim's detailed refutation takes up the elements of this interpretation one by one. Why attach so much importance to the phenomenon of the dream? Assuming that we do conceive that each of us has a double, why make this double sacred? Why assign it an extraordinary import? Ancestor worship, Durkheim adds, is not a primitive cult. Moreover, it is not true that the cults of primitive peoples are addressed particularly to the dead. The cult of the dead is not a primitive phenomenon.

Having decreed that the essence of religion is the sacred, Durkheim does not have much difficulty showing the weaknesses of the animist interpretation. This interpretation may, strictly speaking, explain the creation of a world of spirits; but in Durkheim's eyes the world of spirits is not the world of the sacred. The essential thing, the sacred element, still needs to be explained.

To conclude, I quote a passage in which Durkheim seeks to contrast the true science of religion, which preserves its object, with those pseudo-sciences which tend to rescind it:

It is inadmissible that systems of ideas like religion which have had such a considerable place in history, to which people have turned in all ages for the energy they need to live, should be mere tissues of illusion. It is commonly recognized today that law, morality, scientific thought itself, are born of religion, have long been identified with religion, and have remained imbued with her spirit. How could a vain phantasmagoria have fashioned human consciousness so firmly, so enduringly? Assuredly it must be a principle for the science of religions that religion expresses nothing that is not in nature, for every science is concerned with natural phenomena.

Let me pause for a moment. As a good scientist, Durkheim considers that the science of religions presupposes the unreality of the transcendent as a matter of principle. The transcendent, being supernatural, is automatically excluded by the scientific method. Thus the problem is to rediscover the reality of a religion after having eliminated the supernatural from it.

The question is to discover to what realm of nature these realities belong, and what could have caused men to represent them in the singular manner which is peculiar to religious thought. But in order to raise the question, we must begin by acknowledging that these are real things which are being represented in this way.

When the philosophers of the eighteenth century made religion out to be an enormous error conceived by priests, at least they were able to explain its persistence by the interest the sacerdotal caste had in deceiving the masses. But if the peoples themselves have been the artisans of these systems of erroneous ideas, at the same time that they were their dupes, how has this extraordinary hoax been able to perpetuate itself throughout the course of history?

And, a little further on: "What is the point of a science whose principal discovery would consist in causing the very subject it treats to disappear?" The question is well put. I



suppose that a nonsociologist, or a non-Durkheimian, would be tempted to counter: Does a science of religion according to which men worship society safeguard its object or make it vanish?

#### *IV. Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse (2)*

HAVING EXPUNDED the central theme of this book, I do not now intend to expound in detail the analysis of totemism to be found in Durkheim's book. I should merely like to indicate some of the leading ideas and methods of reasoning, ideas and methods which are part of Durkheim's general sociology.

First, I shall review an idea which is of extreme importance in Durkheim's thought, the idea that totemism is the simplest religion. To say that totemism is the simplest religion implies an evolutionist conception of religious history. In the context of a nonevolutionist viewpoint, totemism would be one religion among others, one simple religion among others. If Durkheim asserts that it is *the* simplest, most elementary religion, he is implicitly acknowledging that religion has an evolution from a single origin.

Also, in order to comprehend the essence of religion from the particular and privileged case of totemism, one must subscribe to a method whereby a well-chosen sample reveals the essence of a phenomenon that is found throughout all societies. The theory of religion is not elaborated on the basis of study of a large number of religious phenomena. The essence of the religious phenomenon is apprehended from one particular case which is regarded as in-