

The Elementary Forms of
RELIGIOUS LIFE

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*Translated and with an Introduction by
Karen E. Fields*



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INTRODUCTION

I

I propose in this book to study the simplest and most primitive religion that is known at present, to discover its principles and attempt an explanation of it. A religious system is said to be the most primitive that is available for observation when it meets the two following conditions: First, it must be found in societies the simplicity of whose organization is nowhere exceeded;¹ second, it must be explainable without the introduction of any element from a predecessor religion.

I will make every effort to describe the organization of this system with all the care and precision that an ethnographer or a historian would bring to the task. But my task will not stop at description. Sociology sets itself different problems from those of history or ethnography. It does not seek to become acquainted with bygone forms of civilization for the sole purpose of being acquainted with and reconstructing them. Instead, like any positive science,* its purpose above all is to explain a present reality that is near to us and thus capable of affecting our ideas and actions. That reality is man. More especially, it is present-day man, for there is none other that we have a greater interest in knowing well. Therefore, my study of a very archaic religion will not be for the sheer pleasure of recounting the bizarre and the eccentric. I have made a very archaic religion the subject of my research because it seems better suited than any other to help us comprehend the religious nature of man, that is, to reveal a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity.

This proposition is bound to provoke strong objections. It may be thought strange that, to arrive at an understanding of present-day humanity, we should have to turn away from it so as to travel back to the beginning of history. In the matter at hand, that procedure seems especially unorthodox. Religions are held to be of unequal value and standing; it is commonly said that not all contain the same measure of truth. Thus it would seem that the higher forms of religious thought cannot be compared with the lower with-

*Here, knowledge (*science*) acquired by means of systematic observation. This use of the term *positive* is indebted to Auguste Comte (1798-1857) who postulated a human evolution from the theological to metaphysical to positive epochs. The complexities of the term *positive* in general, and in Comte's use of it, are examined by André Lalande, *Dictionnaire technique de la philosophie*, Paris, F. Alcan, 1923, pp. 595-600.

¹I will call those societies and the men of those societies primitive in the same sense. This term certainly lacks precision, but it is hard to avoid; if care is taken to specify its meaning, however, it can safely be used.

out bringing the higher forms down to the lower level. To grant that the crude cults of Australian tribes might help us understand Christianity, for example, is to assume—is it not?—that Christianity proceeds from the same mentality, in other words, that it is made up of the same superstitions and rests on the same errors. The theoretical importance sometimes accorded to primitive religions could therefore be taken as evidence of a systematic irreligion that invalidated the results of research by prejudging them.

I need not go into the question here whether scholars can be found who were guilty of this and who have made history and the ethnography of religion a means of making war against religion. In any event, such could not possibly be a sociologist's point of view. Indeed, it is a fundamental postulate of sociology that a human institution cannot rest upon error and falsehood. If it did, it could not endure. If it had not been grounded in the nature of things, in those very things it would have met resistance that it could not have overcome. Therefore, when I approach the study of primitive religions, it is with the certainty that they are grounded in and express the real. In the course of the analyses and discussions that follow, we will see this principle coming up again and again. What I criticize in the schools I part company with is precisely that they have failed to recognize it. No doubt, when all we do is consider the formulas literally, these religious beliefs and practices appear disconcerting, and our inclination might be to write them off to some sort of inborn aberration. But we must know how to reach beneath the symbol to grasp the reality it represents and that gives the symbol its true meaning. The most bizarre or barbarous rites and the strangest myths translate some human need and some aspect of life, whether social or individual. The reasons the faithful settle for in justifying those rites and myths may be mistaken, and most often are; but the true reasons exist nonetheless, and it is the business of science to uncover them.

Fundamentally, then, there are no religions that are false. All are true after their own fashion: All fulfill given conditions of human existence, though in different ways. Granted, it is not impossible to rank them hierarchically. Some can be said to be superior to others, in the sense that they bring higher mental faculties into play, that they are richer in ideas and feelings, that they contain proportionately more concepts than sensations and images, and that they are more elaborately systematized. But the greater complexity and higher ideal content, however real, are not sufficient to place the corresponding religions into separate genera. All are equally religious, just as all living beings are equally living beings, from the humblest plastid to man. If I address myself to primitive religions, then, it is not with any ulterior motive of disparaging religion in general: These religions are to be respected no less

than the others. They fulfill the same needs, play the same role, and proceed from the same causes; therefore, they can serve just as well to elucidate the nature of religious life and, it follows, to solve the problem I wish to treat.

Still, why give them a kind of priority? Why choose them in preference to others as the subject of my study? This choice is solely for reasons of method.

First of all, we cannot arrive at an understanding of the most modern religions without tracing historically the manner in which they have gradually taken shape. Indeed, history is the only method of explanatory analysis that can be applied to them. History alone enables us to break down an institution into its component parts, because it shows those parts to us as they are born in time, one after the other. Second, by situating each part of the institution within the totality of circumstances in which it was born, history puts into our hands the only tools we have for identifying the causes that have brought it into being. Thus, whenever we set out to explain something human at a specific moment in time—be it a religious belief, a moral rule, a legal principle, an aesthetic technique, or an economic system—we must begin by going back to its simplest and most primitive form. We must seek to account for the features that define it at that period of its existence and then show how it has gradually developed, gained in complexity, and become what it is at the moment under consideration.

It is easy to see how important the determination of the initial starting point is for this series of progressive explanations. A cartesian principle had it that the first link takes precedence in the chain of scientific truths. To be sure, it is out of the question to base the science of religions on a notion elaborated in the cartesian manner—that is, a logical concept, pure possibility constructed solely by force of intellect. What we must find is a concrete reality that historical and ethnographic observation alone can reveal to us. But if that primary conception must be arrived at by other methods, the fact remains that it is destined to have an important influence on all the subsequent propositions that science establishes. Biological evolution was conceived altogether differently from the moment the existence of unicellular organisms was discovered. Likewise, the particulars of religious facts are explained differently if naturism is placed at the beginning of religious evolution than if animism, or some other form, is placed there. Indeed, even the most specialized scholars must choose a hypothesis and take their inspiration from it if they want to try to account for the facts they analyze—unless they mean to confine themselves to a task of pure erudition. Willy-nilly, the questions they ask take the following form: What has caused naturism or animism to take on such and such a particular aspect here or there, and to be enriched or impoverished in such and such a way? Since taking a position on the initial problem is un-

avoidable, and since the solution given will affect the science as a whole, the problem is best confronted at the outset. This is what I propose to do.

Besides, apart from those indirect consequences, the study of primitive religions in itself has immediate interest of the first importance.

If it is useful to know what a given religion consists of; it is far more important to examine what religion is in general. This is a problem that has always intrigued philosophers, and not without reason: It is of interest to all humanity. Unfortunately, the method philosophers ordinarily use to solve it is purely one of dialectic: All they do is analyze the idea they have of religion, even if they have to illustrate the results of that mental analysis with examples borrowed from those religions that best suit their model. But while this method must be abandoned, the problem of definition remains; and philosophy's great service has been to prevent it from being settled once and for all* by the disdain of the savants. The problem can in fact be approached in another way. Since all religions may be compared, all being species within the same genus, some elements are of necessity common to them all. By that I mean not only the outward and visible features that they all equally exhibit and that make it possible to define religion in a provisional way at the beginning of research. The discovery of these apparent signs is relatively easy, for the observation required does not go beyond the surface of things. But these external resemblances presuppose deeper ones. At the foundation of all systems of belief and all cults, there must necessarily be a certain number of fundamental representations and modes of ritual conduct† that, despite the diversity of forms that the one and the other may have taken on, have the same objective meaning everywhere and everywhere fulfill the same functions. It is these enduring elements that constitute what is eternal and human in religion. They are the whole objective content of the idea that is expressed when *religion* in general is spoken of.

How, then, can those elements be uncovered?

Surely it is not by observing the complex religions that have arisen in the course of history. Each of those religions is formed from such a variety of elements that it is very hard to distinguish what is secondary to them from what is primary, and what is essential from what is accessory. Simply consider religions like those of Egypt, India, or classical antiquity! Each is a dense tangle of many cults that can vary according to localities, temples, generations, dynasties, invasions, and so on. Popular superstitions intermingle in them with the most sophisticated dogmas. Neither religious thinking nor religious

*Swain rendered Durkheim's *prescrit* as "suppressed," as if he had written *proscrit*.

†*Attitudes rituelles*. On this phrase, see below, p. 301n.

practice is shared equally among the mass of the faithful. The beliefs as well as the rites are taken in different ways, depending on men, milieux, and circumstances. Here it is priests, there monks, elsewhere the laity; here, mystics and rationalists, theologians and prophets, and so on. Under such conditions, it is difficult to perceive what might be common to all. It is indeed possible to find ways of studying some particular phenomenon fruitfully—such as prophetism, monasticism, or the mysteries—through one or another of those systems in which it is especially well developed. But how can one find the common basis of religious life under the luxuriant vegetation that grows over it? How can one find the fundamental states characteristic of the religious mentality in general through the clash of theologies, the variations of ritual, the multiplicity of groupings, and the diversity of individuals?

The case is altogether different in the lower societies. The lesser development of individuality, the smaller scale of the group, and the homogeneity of external circumstances all contribute to reducing the differences and variations to a minimum. The group regularly produces an intellectual and moral uniformity of which we find only rare examples in the more advanced societies. Everything is common to everyone. The movements are stereotyped; everyone executes the same ones in the same circumstances; and this conformity of conduct merely translates that of thought. Since all the consciousnesses are pulled along in the same current, the individual type virtually confounds itself with the generic type. At the same time that all is uniform, all is simple. What could be more basic than those myths composed of a single theme, repeated endlessly, or than those rites composed of a small number of movements, repeated until the participants can do no more. Neither the popular nor the priestly imagination has yet had the time or the means to refine and transform the basic material of ideas and religious practices; reduced to essentials, that material spontaneously presents itself to examination, and discovering it calls for only a minimal effort. Inessential, secondary, and luxurious developments have not yet come to hide what is primary.² Everything is boiled down to what is absolutely indispensable, to that without which there would be no religion. But the indispensable is also the fundamental, in other words, that which it is above all important for us to know.

Thus, primitive civilizations are prime cases because they are simple cases. This is why, among all the orders of facts, the observations of ethnog-

²This is not to say, of course, that primitive cults do not go beyond bare essentials. Quite the contrary, as we will see, religious beliefs and practices that do not have narrowly utilitarian aims are found in every religion (Bk. III, chap. 4, §2). This nonutilitarian richness is indispensable to religious life, and of its very essence. But it is by far less well developed in the lower religions than in the others, and this fact will put us in a better position to determine its *raison d'être*.

raphers have often been veritable revelations that have breathed new life into the study of human institutions. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, it was generally believed that the father was the essential element of the family; it was not even imaginable that there could be a family organization of which paternal power was not the keystone. Bachofen's discovery toppled that old notion. Until quite recent times, it was thought obvious that the moral and legal relations that constitute kinship were only another aspect of the physiological relations that result from shared descent. Bachofen and his successors, McLennan, Morgan, and many others, were still operating under the influence of that preconception. But, quite the contrary, we have known ever since we became acquainted with the nature of the primitive clan that kinship cannot be defined by common blood.* To return to religions: Exclusive consideration of the religious forms that are the most familiar to us long led us to believe that the idea of god was characteristic of all that is religious. The religion I will study below is largely a stranger to any notion of divinity. In it, the forces to which the rites are addressed differ greatly from those that are of paramount importance in our modern religions, and yet they will help us to understand our modern religions better. Nothing is more unjust, therefore, than the disdain with which too many historians still regard ethnographers' work. In point of fact, ethnography has often brought about the most fertile revolutions in the various branches of sociology. For the same reason, moreover, the discovery of unicellular creatures, which I noted earlier, transformed the idea of life that was widely held. Since life is down to its fundamental features among very simple beings, those features may be less easily misread.

But primitive religions do not merely allow us to isolate the constituent elements of religion; their great advantage is also that they aid in its explanation. Because the facts are simpler, the relations between them are more apparent. The reasons men invoke to explain their actions to themselves have not yet been refined and revamped by sophisticated thought: They are closer and more akin to the motives that caused those actions. To understand a delusion properly and to be able to apply the most appropriate treatment, the doctor needs to know what its point of departure was. That event is the more easily detected the nearer to its beginnings the delusion can be observed.

*Jacob Johann Bachofen (1815–1887) postulated the existence of matriliney (reckoning descent through the female line) and matriarchy or mother right, a stage he envisaged as standing between primitive promiscuity and patriarchy. Ethnographic study worldwide has borne out the first and discredited the second. Like Bachofen, John Ferguson McLennan (1827–1881) and Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) were lawyers interested in the rules that govern family and property. Among other achievements, Morgan pioneered the study of kin statuses distinct from blood relationship; McLennan is credited with having drawn attention to totemism. See below, Bk.I. chap.4, p. 85.

Conversely, the longer a sickness is left to develop, the more that original point of departure slips out of view. This is so because all sorts of interpretations have intervened along the way, and the tendency of those interpretations is to repress the original state into the unconscious and to replace it with other states through which the original one is sometimes not easy to detect. The distance between a systematized delusion and the first impressions that gave birth to it is often considerable. The same applies to religious thought. As it progresses historically, the causes that called it into existence, though still at work, are seen no more except through a vast system of distorting interpretations. The popular mythologies and the subtle theologies have done their work: They have overlaid the original feelings with very different ones that, although stemming from primitive feelings of which they are the elaborated form, nevertheless allow their true nature to show only in part. The psychological distance between the cause and the effect, and between the apparent cause and the effective cause, has become wider and more difficult for the mind to overcome. The remainder of this work will be an illustration and a test of this methodological point. We will see how, in the primitive religions, the religious phenomenon still carries the visible imprint of its origins. It would have been much more difficult for us to infer those origins by considering more developed religions alone.

Thus, the study I undertake is a way of taking up again the old problem of the origin of religions *but under new conditions*. Granted, if by origin one means an absolute first beginning, there is nothing scientific about the question, and it must be resolutely set aside. There is no radical instant when religion began to exist, and the point is not to find a roundabout way of conveying ourselves there in thought. Like every other human institution, religion begins nowhere. So all speculations in this genre are rightly discredited; they can consist of only subjective and arbitrary constructions without checks of any sort. The problem I pose is altogether different. I would like to find a means of discerning the ever-present causes on which the most basic forms of religious thought and practice depend. For the reasons just set forth, the causes are more easily observable if the societies in which they are observed are less complex. That is why I seek to get closer to the origins.³ The reason is not that I ascribe special virtues to the lower religions. Quite the contrary, they are crude and rudimentary; so there can be no question of making them out to be models of some sort, which the later religions would

³It will be seen that I give the word "origins," like the word "primitive," an entirely relative sense. I do not mean by it an absolute beginning but the simplest social state known at present—the state beyond which it is at present impossible for us to go. When I speak about origins and the beginnings of history or religious thought, this is the sense in which those phrases must be understood.

only have had to reproduce. But their very lack of elaboration makes them instructive, for in this way they become useful experiments in which the facts and the relations among facts are easier to detect. To uncover the laws of the phenomena he studies, the physicist seeks to simplify those phenomena and to rid them of their secondary characteristics. In the case of institutions, nature spontaneously makes simplifications of the same kind at the beginning of history. I wish only to put those simplifications to good use. Doubtless, I will be able to obtain only very elementary facts by this method. When I have accounted for them, to the extent this will be possible, the novelties of all kinds that have been produced in the course of evolution will still not be explained. But although I would not dream of denying the importance of the problems such novelties pose, I think those problems benefit by being treated at the proper time, and there is good reason not to tackle them until after those whose study I have undertaken.

II

My research is not solely of interest to the science of religions. There is an aspect of every religion that transcends the realm of specifically religious ideas. Through it, the study of religious phenomena provides a means of revisiting problems that until now have been debated only among philosophers.

It has long been known that the first systems of representations that man made of the world and himself were of religious origin. There is no religion that is not both a cosmology and a speculation about the divine. If philosophy and the sciences were born in religion, it is because religion itself began by serving as science and philosophy. Further, and less often noted, religion has not merely enriched a human intellect already formed but in fact has helped to form it. Men owe to religion not only the content of their knowledge, in significant part, but also the form in which that knowledge is elaborated.

At the root of our judgments, there are certain fundamental notions that dominate our entire intellectual life. It is these ideas that philosophers, beginning with Aristotle, have called the categories of understanding: notions of time, space,⁴ number, cause, substance, personality.* They correspond to

*Usually referred to in Kantian circles as the "categories of understanding" or the "categories of the understanding," technically these are called "pure concepts of understanding"—that is, concepts, or rules for organizing the variety of sense perceptions, that lie ready in the mind and are brought into play by our efforts to make sense of our sensations. For clarifying correspondence on these points, I thank Professor Robert Paul Wolff.

⁴I call time and space categories because there is no difference between the role these notions play in intellectual life and that which falls to notions of kind and cause. (See on this point [Octave] Hamelin, *Essai sur les éléments principaux de la représentation*, Paris, Alcan [1907], pp. 63, 76.)

the most universal properties of things. They are like solid frames that confine thought. Thought does not seem to be able to break out of them without destroying itself, since it seems we cannot think of objects that are not in time or space, that cannot be counted, and so forth. The other ideas are contingent and changing, and we can conceive of a man, a society, or an epoch that lacks them; but these fundamental notions seem to us as almost inseparable from the normal functioning of the intellect. They are, as it were, the skeleton of thought. Now, when one analyzes primitive religious beliefs methodically, one naturally finds the principal categories among them. They are born in and from religion; they are a product of religious thought. This is a point that I will make again and again in the course of this book.

Even now that point has a certain interest of its own, but here is what gives it its true significance.

The general conclusion of the chapters to follow is that religion is an eminently social thing. Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain mental states of those groups. But if the categories are of religious origin, then they must participate in* what is common to all religion: They, too, must be social things, products of collective thought. At the very least—since with our present understanding of these matters, radical and exclusive theses are to be guarded against—it is legitimate to say that they are rich in social elements.

This, it must be added, is something one can begin to see even now for certain of the categories. For example, what if one tried to imagine what the notion of time would be in the absence of the methods we use to divide, measure, and express it with objective signs, a time that was not a succession of years, months, weeks, days, and hours? It would be nearly impossible to conceive of. We can conceive of time only if we differentiate between moments. Now, what is the origin of that differentiation? Undoubtedly, states of consciousness that we have already experienced can be reproduced in us in the same order in which they originally occurred; and, in this way, bits of our past become immediate again, even while spontaneously distinguishing themselves from the present. But however important this distinction might

*The phrase "participate in," which occurs frequently, has usually not been replaced with simpler possibilities such as "partakes of" or "shares in" because the notion of participation that can be seen in the sentence "Jesus participated in divine and human nature" must be borne in mind, together with an argument in which Durkheim was engaged. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, whose book *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* Durkheim criticizes, considered "participations" to exemplify the inherent illogic of "primitive" thought. Durkheim held just the opposite.

be for our private experience, it is far from sufficient to constitute the notion or category of time. The category of time is not simply a partial or complete commemoration of our lived life. It is an abstract and impersonal framework that contains not only our individual existence but also that of humanity. It is like an endless canvas on which all duration is spread out before the mind's eye and on which all possible events are located in relation to points of reference that are fixed and specified. It is not *my time* that is organized in this way; it is time that is conceived of objectively by all men of the same civilization. This by itself is enough to make us begin to see that any such organization would have to be collective. And indeed, observation establishes that these indispensable points, in reference to which all things are arranged temporally, are taken from social life. The division into days, weeks, months, years, etc., corresponds to the recurrence of rites, festivals, and public ceremonies at regular intervals.⁵ A calendar expresses the rhythm of collective activity while ensuring that regularity.⁶

The same applies to space. As Hamelin⁷ has shown, space is not the vague and indeterminate medium that Kant imagined. If purely and absolutely homogeneous, it would be of no use and would offer nothing for thought to hold on to. Spatial representation essentially consists in a primary coordination of given sense experience. But this coordination would be impossible if the parts of space were qualitatively equivalent, if they really were mutually interchangeable. To have a spatial ordering of things is to be able to situate them differently: to place some on the right, others on the left, these above, those below, north or south, east or west, and so forth, just as, to arrange states of consciousness temporally, it must be possible to locate them at definite dates. That is, space would not be itself if, like time, it was not divided and differentiated. But where do these divisions that are essential to

⁵In support of this assertion, see Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Mélanges d'histoire des religions*, the chapter on "La Représentation du temps dans la religion," Paris, Alcan [1909].

⁶Through this we see how completely different are the complexus of sensations and images that serves to orient us in duration, and the category of time. The first are the summary of individual experiences, which hold only for the individual who has had them. By contrast, the category of time expresses a time common to the group—social time, so to speak. This category itself is a true social institution. Thus it is peculiar to man; animals have no representation of this kind.

This distinction between the category of time and the corresponding individual sensations could easily be made in regard to space and cause. This may perhaps help clear up certain confusions, which have fed controversies on these questions. I will return to this point at the Conclusion of the present work.

⁷Hamelin, *Essai sur les éléments principaux de la représentation*, pp. 75ff.

space come from? In itself it has no right, no left, no high or low, no north or south, etc. All these distinctions evidently arise from the fact that different affective colorings have been assigned to regions. And since all men of the same civilization conceive of space in the same manner, it is evidently necessary that these affective colorings and the distinctions that arise from them also be held in common—which implies almost necessarily that they are of social origin.⁸

Besides, in some instances this social character is made manifest. There are societies in Australia and North America in which space is conceived in the form of an immense circle, because the camp itself is circular;⁹ and the spatial circle is divided in exactly the same way as the tribal circle and in its image. As many regions are distinguished as there are clans in the tribe, and it is the place the clans occupy in the encampment that determines the orientation of the regions. Each region is defined by the totem of the clan to which it is assigned. Among the Zuñi, for example, the pueblo is made up of seven sections; each of these sections is a group of clans that has acquired its own unity. In all likelihood, it was originally a single clan that later subdivided. Space similarly contains seven regions, and each of these seven sections of the world is in intimate relationship with a section of the pueblo, that is, with a group of clans.¹⁰ "Thus," says Cushing, "one division is considered to be in relation with the north; another represents the west, another the south,¹¹ etc." Each section of the pueblo has its distinctive color, which symbolizes it; each region has its own color, which is that of the corresponding section. Over the course of history, the number of basic clans has varied, and the number of regions has varied in the same way. Thus, spatial organization was modeled on social organization and replicates it. Far from being built into human nature, no idea exists, up to and including the distinction be-

⁸Otherwise, in order to explain this agreement, one would have to accept the idea that all individuals, by virtue of their organico-psychic constitution, are affected in the same manner by the different parts of space—which is all the more improbable since the different regions have no affective coloring. Moreover, the divisions of space vary among societies—proof that they are not based exclusively on the inborn nature of man.

⁹See Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, "De Quelques formes primitives de la classification," *AS*, vol. VI, 1903, pp. 47ff.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 34ff.

¹¹[Frank Hamilton] Cushing, "Outlines of Zuñi Creation Myths," *Thirteenth Report*, BAE, Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1896, pp. 367ff. [Throughout, quoted material is translated into English from Durkheim's French renderings.]

tween right and left, that is not, in all probability, the product of religious, hence collective, representations.¹²

Analogous demonstrations concerning the notions of genus, force, personality, and efficacy will be found below. One might even ask whether the notion of contradiction does not also arise from social conditions. What tends to make this plausible is the fact that the hold the notion of contradiction has had over thought has varied with times and societies. Today the principle of identity governs scientific thought; but there are vast systems of representation that have played a major role in the history of ideas, in which it is commonly ignored: These systems are the mythologies, from the crudest to the most sophisticated.¹³ Mythologies deal with beings that have the most contradictory attributes at the same time, that are one and many, material and spiritual, and capable of subdividing themselves indefinitely without losing that which makes them what they are. These historical variations of the rule that seems to govern our present logic show that, far from being encoded from eternity in the mental constitution of man, the rule depends at least in part upon historical, hence social, factors. We do not know exactly what these factors are, but we can presume that they exist.¹⁴

Once this hypothesis is accepted, the problem of knowledge can be framed in new terms.

Up to the present, only two doctrines have opposed one another. For some, the categories cannot be derived from experience. They are logically prior to experience and condition it. They are thought of as so many simple data that are irreducible and immanent in the human intellect by virtue of its natural makeup. They are thus called *a priori*. For others, by contrast, the categories are constructed, made out of bits and pieces, and it is the individual who is the artisan of that construction.¹⁵

¹²See Robert Hertz, "La Prééminence de la main droite: Etude de polarité religieuse," *RP*, December, 1909. On this question of the relations between the representation of space and the form of the group, see the chapter in [Friedrich] Ratzel, *Politische Geographie* [Leipzig, R. Oldenbourg, 1897], titled "Der Raum im Geiste der Völker" [pp. 261–262].

¹³I do not mean to say that it is unknown to mythological thinking but that mythological thinking departs from this principle more often and more overtly than scientific thought. Conversely, I will show that science cannot help but violate it, even while following it more scrupulously than religion does. In this respect and many others, there are only differences of degree between science and religion; but if these should not be overstated, it is important to notice them, for they are significant.

¹⁴This hypothesis has already been advanced by the founders of *Völkerpsychologie*. It is referred to, for example, in a short article by Wilhelm Windelband titled, "Die Erkenntnislehre unter dem Völkerpsychologischen Gesichtspunkte," in *ZV* [Lichtenstein, Kraus Reprints, Ltd., 1968], VIII, pp. 166ff. Cf. a note by [Heymann] Steintal on the same subject, *ibid.*, pp. 178ff.

¹⁵Even in the theory of [Herbert] Spencer, the categories are constructed from experience. The only difference in this respect between ordinary and evolutionary empiricism is that, according to the latter,

Both solutions give rise to grave difficulties.

Is the empiricist thesis adopted? Then the categories must be stripped of their characteristic properties. In fact, they are distinguished from all other knowledge by their universality and their necessity. They are the most general concepts that exist, because they are applied to all that is real; and just as they are not attached to any particular object, they are independent of any individual subject. They are the common ground where all minds meet. What is more, minds meet there of necessity: Reason, which is none other than the fundamental categories taken together, is vested with an authority that we cannot escape at will. When we try to resist it, to free ourselves from some of these fundamental notions, we meet sharp resistance. Hence, far from merely depending upon us, they impose themselves upon us. But the characteristics of empirical data are diametrically opposite. A sensation or an image is always linked to a definite object or collection of definite objects, and it expresses the momentary state of a particular consciousness. It is fundamentally individual and subjective. Moreover, we can do as we wish with representations that are of this origin. Of course, when sensations are present to us, they impose themselves on us *in fact*. *By right*, however, we remain free to conceive them otherwise than they are and to picture them as occurring in an order different from the one in which they occurred. In regard to them, nothing is binding on us unless considerations of a different sort intervene. Here, then, are two sorts of knowledge that are like opposite poles of the intellect. Under these conditions, to reduce reason to experience is to make reason disappear—because it is to reduce the universality and necessity that characterize reason to mere appearances, illusions that might be practically convenient but that correspond to nothing in things. Consequently, it is to deny all objective reality to that logical life which the function of the categories is to regulate and organize. Classical empiricism leads to irrationalism; perhaps it should be called by that name.

Notwithstanding the sense we ordinarily attach to the labels, it is the apriorists who are more attentive to the facts. Since they do not take it as self-evident truth that the categories are made of the same elements as our sense representations, they are not committed to impoverishing the categories systematically, emptying them of all real content and reducing them to mere verbal artifices. Quite the contrary, apriorists leave the categories with all their distinctive characteristics. The apriorists are rationalists; they believe

the results of individual experience are consolidated by heredity. But that consolidation adds nothing essential; no element enters into their composition that does not originate in the experience of the individual. Also, according to that theory, the necessity with which the categories impose themselves upon us in the present is itself the product of an illusion, a superstitious prejudice that is deeply rooted in the organism but without foundation in the nature of things.

that the world has a logical aspect that reason eminently expresses. To do this, however, they have to ascribe to the intellect a certain power to transcend experience and add to what is immediately given. But for this singular power, they offer neither explanation nor warrant. Merely to say it is inherent in the nature of human intellect is not to explain that power. It would still be necessary to see where we acquire this astounding prerogative and how we are able to see relationships in things that mere spectating cannot reveal to us. To confine oneself to saying that experience itself is possible only on that condition is to shift the problem, perhaps, but not to solve it. The point is to know how it happens that experience is not enough, but presupposes conditions that are external and prior to experience, and how it happens that these conditions are met at the time and in the manner needed. To answer these questions, it has sometimes been imagined that, beyond the reason of individuals, there is a superior and perfect reason from which that of individuals emanated and, by a sort of mystic participation, presumably acquired its marvelous faculty: That superior and perfect reason is divine reason. But, at best, this hypothesis has the grave disadvantage of being shielded from all experimental control, so it does not meet the requirements of a scientific hypothesis. More than that, the categories of human thought are never fixed in a definite form; they are ceaselessly made, unmade, and remade; they vary according to time and place. By contrast, divine reason is immutable. How could this invariance account for such constant variability?

Such are the two conceptions that have competed for centuries. And if the debate has gone on and on, it is because the arguments back and forth are in fact more or less equivalent. If reason is but a form of individual experience, then reason is no more. On the other hand, if the capacities with which it is credited are recognized but left unaccounted for, then reason apparently is placed outside nature and science. Faced with these opposite objections, the intellect remains uncertain. But if the social origin of the categories is accepted, a new stance becomes possible, one that should enable us, I believe, to avoid these opposite difficulties.

The fundamental thesis of apriorism is that knowledge is formed from two sorts of elements that are irreducible one to the other—two distinct, superimposed layers, so to speak.¹⁶ My hypothesis keeps this principle intact. The knowledge that people speak of as empirical—all that theorists of empiricism have ever used to construct reason—is the knowledge that the direct

¹⁶It is perhaps surprising that I should not define apriorism by the hypothesis of innateness. But that idea actually has only a secondary role in the doctrine. It is a simplistic way of portraying the irreducibility of rational cognition to empirical data. To call it innate is no more than a positive way of saying that it is not a product of experience as usually conceived.

action of objects calls forth in our minds. Thus they are individual states that are wholly¹⁷ explained by the psychic nature of the individual. But if the categories are essentially collective representations, as I think they are, they translate states of the collectivity, first and foremost. They depend upon the way in which the collectivity is organized, upon its morphology, its religious, moral, and economic institutions, and so on. Between these two kinds of representations, then, is all the distance that separates the individual from the social; one can no more derive the second from the first than one can deduce the society from the individual, the whole from the part, or the complex from the simple.¹⁸ Society is a reality *sui generis*; it has its own characteristics that are either not found in the rest of the universe or are not found there in the same form. The representations that express society therefore have an altogether different content from the purely individual representations, and one can be certain in advance that the former add something to the latter.

The manner in which both kinds of representations are formed brings about their differentiation. Collective representations are the product of an immense cooperation that extends not only through space but also through time; to make them, a multitude of different minds have associated, intermixed, and combined their ideas and feelings; long generations have accumulated their experience and knowledge. A very special intellectuality that is infinitely richer and more complex than that of the individual is distilled in them. That being the case, we understand how reason has gained the power to go beyond the range of empirical cognition. It owes this power not to some mysterious virtue but simply to the fact that, as the well-known formula has it, man is double. In him are two beings: an individual being that has its basis in the body and whose sphere of action is strictly limited by this fact, and a social being that represents within us the highest reality in the intellectual and moral* realm that is knowable through observation: I mean so-

*On Durkheim's characteristic uses of the term "moral," see above, p. lv-lvi.

¹⁷At least to the extent that there are individual, and thus fully empirical, representations. But in fact there probably is no case in which those two sorts of elements are not found closely bound up together.

¹⁸Furthermore, this irreducibility should not be understood in an absolute sense. I do not mean that there is nothing in the empirical representations that announces the rational ones, or that there is nothing in the individual that can be considered the harbinger of social life. If experience was completely foreign to all that is rational, reason would not be applicable to it. Likewise, if the psychic nature of the individual was absolutely resistant to social life, society would be impossible. Therefore a full analysis of the categories would look for the seeds of rationality in individual consciousness. I shall have occasion to return to this point in my Conclusion. All I wish to establish here is that there is a distance between the indistinct seeds of reason and reason properly so-called that is comparable to the distance between the properties of mineral elements, from which the living being is made, and the characteristic properties of life, once constituted.

ciety [*J'entends la société*]. In the realm of practice, the consequence of this duality in our nature is the irreducibility of the moral ideal to the utilitarian motive; in the realm of thought, it is the irreducibility of reason to individual experience. As part of society, the individual naturally transcends himself, both when he thinks and when he acts.

This same social characteristic enables us to understand where the necessity of the categories comes from. An idea is said to be necessary* when, due to some sort of internal property, it enjoys credence without the support of any proof. It thus contains in itself something that compels the intellect and wins over intellectual adherence without prior examination. Apriorism postulates that remarkable capacity without accounting for it. To say that the categories are necessary because they are indispensable to thought is simply to repeat that they are necessary. But if they have the origin that I am attributing to them, nothing about their ascendancy should surprise us any longer. They do indeed express the most general relationships that exist between things; having broader scope than all our ideas, they govern all the particulars of our intellectual life. If, at every moment, men did not agree on these fundamental ideas, if they did not have a homogeneous conception of time, space, cause, number, and so on. All consensus among minds, and thus all common life, would become impossible.

Hence society cannot leave the categories up to the free choice of individuals without abandoning itself. To live, it requires not only a minimum moral consensus but also a minimum logical consensus that it cannot do without either. Thus, in order to prevent dissidence, society weighs on its members with all its authority. Does a mind seek to free itself from these norms of all thought? Society no longer considers this a human mind in the full sense, and treats it accordingly. This is why it is that when we try, even deep down inside, to get away from these fundamental notions, we feel that we are not fully free; something resists us, from inside and outside ourselves. Outside us, it is opinion that judges us; more than that, because society is represented inside us as well, it resists these revolutionary impulses from within. We feel that we cannot abandon ourselves to them without our thought's ceasing to be truly human. Such appears to be the origin of the very special authority that is inherent in reason and that makes us trustingly accept its promptings. This is none other than the authority of society¹⁹ passing into certain ways of thinking that are the indispensable conditions of all

*Note here that the sense of the word "necessary" is distinct from the everyday concept of need. See also the next paragraph.

¹⁹It has often been noticed that social disturbances multiply mental disturbances. This is further evidence that logical discipline is an aspect of social discipline. The former relaxes when the latter weakens.

common action. Thus the necessity with which the categories press themselves upon us is not merely the effect of habits whose yoke we could slip with little effort; nor is that necessity a habit or a physical or metaphysical need, since the categories change with place and time; it is a special sort of moral necessity that is to intellectual life what obligation is to the will.²⁰

But if the categories at first do no more than translate social states, does it not follow that they can be applied to the rest of nature only as metaphors? If their purpose is merely to express social things, it would seem that they could be extended to other realms only by convention. Thus, insofar as they serve us in conceiving the physical or biological world, they can only have the value of artificial symbols—useful perhaps, but with no connection to reality. We would thus return to nominalism and empiricism by another route.

To interpret a sociological theory of knowledge in that way is to forget that even if society is a specific reality, it is not an empire within an empire: It is part of nature and nature's highest expression. The social realm is a natural realm that differs from others only in its greater complexity. It is impossible that nature, in that which is most fundamental in itself, should be radically different between one part and another of itself. It is impossible that the fundamental relations that exist between things—precisely those relations that the categories serve to express—should be fundamentally dissimilar in one realm and another. If, for reasons that we shall have to discover,²¹ they stand out more clearly in the social world, it is impossible that they should not be found elsewhere, though in more shrouded forms. Society makes them more manifest but has no monopoly on them. This is why notions worked out on the model of social things can help us think about other sorts of things. At the very least, if, when they deviate from their initial meaning, those notions play in a sense the role of symbols, it is the role of well-founded symbols. If artifice enters in, through the very fact that these are constructed concepts, it is an artifice that closely follows nature and strives to come ever closer to nature.²² The fact

²⁰There is an analogy between this logical necessity and moral obligation but not identity—at least not at present. Today, society treats criminals differently from people who are mentally handicapped. This is evidence that, despite significant similarities, the authority attached to logical norms and that inherent in moral norms are not of the same nature. They are two different species of one genus. It would be interesting to research what that difference (probably not primitive) consists of and where it comes from, since for a long time public consciousness barely distinguished the delinquent from the mentally ill. From this example, we can see the numerous problems raised by the analysis of these notions, which are generally thought elementary and simple but actually are extremely complex.

²¹This question is treated in the Conclusion of this book.

²²Hence the rationalism that is immanent in a sociological theory of knowledge stands between empiricism and classical apriorism. For the first, the categories are purely artificial constructs; for the second, on the other hand, they are naturally given; for us, they are works of art, in a sense, but an art that imitates nature ever more perfectly.

that the ideas of time, space, genus, cause, and personality are constructed from social elements should not lead us to conclude that they are stripped of all objective value. Quite the contrary, their social origin leads one indeed to suppose that they are not without foundation in the nature of things.²³

In this fresh formulation, the theory of knowledge seems destined to join the opposite advantages of the two rival theories, without their disadvantages. It preserves all the essential principles of apriorism but at the same time takes inspiration from the positive turn of mind that empiricism sought to satisfy. It leaves reason with its specific power, but accounts for that power, and does so without leaving the observable world. It affirms as real the duality of our intellectual life, but explains that duality, and does so with natural causes. The categories cease to be regarded as primary and unanalyzable facts; and yet they remain of such complexity that analyses as simplistic as those with which empiricism contented itself cannot possibly be right. No longer do they appear as very simple notions that anyone can sift from his personal observations, and that popular imagination unfortunately complicated; quite the contrary, they appear as ingenious instruments of thought, which human groups have painstakingly forged over centuries, and in which they have amassed the best of their intellectual capital.²⁴ A whole aspect of human history is, in a way, summed up in them. This amounts to saying that to succeed in understanding and evaluating them, it is necessary to turn to new procedures. To know what the conceptions that we ourselves have not made are made of, it cannot be enough to consult our own consciousness. We must look outside ourselves, observe history, and institute a whole science, a complex one at that, which can advance only slowly and by collective labor. The present work is an attempt to make certain fragmentary contributions to that science. Without making these questions the direct subject of my study, I will take advantage of all the opportunities that present themselves to capture at birth at least some of those ideas that, while religious in origin, were bound nevertheless to remain at the basis of human mentality.

²³For example, the category of time has its basis in the rhythm of social life; but if there is a rhythm of collective life, one can be certain that there is another in the life of the individual and, more generally, that of the universe. The first is only more marked and apparent than the others. Likewise, we will see that the notion of kind was formed from that of the human group. But if men form natural groups, one can suppose that there exist among things groups that are at once similar to them and different. These natural groups of things are genera and species.

²⁴This is why it is legitimate to compare the categories with tools: Tools, for their part, are accumulated material capital. Moreover, there is close kinship between the three ideas of tool, category, and institution.

ORIGINS OF THESE BELIEFS (CONCLUSION)

Origin of the Notion of Totemic Principle, or Mana

THE proposition established in the preceding chapter defines the terms in which the problem of how totemism originated must be posed. The central notion of totemism is that of a quasi-divine principle that is immanent in certain categories of men and things and thought of in the form of an animal or plant. In essence, therefore, to explain this religion is to explain this belief—that is, to discover what could have led men to construct it and with what building blocks.

I

It is manifestly not with the feelings the things that serve as totems are capable of arousing in men's minds. I have shown that these are often insignificant. In the sort of impression lizards, caterpillars, rats, ants, frogs, turkeys, breams, plum trees, cockatoos, and so forth make upon man (to cite only the names that come up frequently on lists of Australian totems), there is nothing that in any way resembles grand and powerful religious emotions or could stamp upon them a quality of sacredness. The same cannot be said of stars and great atmospheric phenomena, which do have all that is required to seize men's imaginations. As it happens, however, these serve very rarely as totems; indeed, their use for this purpose was probably a late development.¹ Thus it was not the intrinsic nature of the thing whose name the clan bore that set it apart as the object of worship. Furthermore, if the emotion elicited by the thing itself really was the determining cause of totemic rites and beliefs, then this thing would also be the sacred being par excellence, and the

¹See above, p. 102.

animals and plants used as totems would play the leading role in religious life. But we know that the focus of the cult is elsewhere. It is symbolic representations of this or that plant or animal. It is totemic emblems and symbols of all kinds that possess the greatest sanctity. And so it is in totemic emblems and symbols that the religious source is to be found, while the real objects represented by those emblems receive only a reflection.

The totem is above all a symbol, a tangible expression of something else.² But of what?

It follows from the same analysis that the totem expresses and symbolizes two different kinds of things. From one point of view, it is the outward and visible form of what I have called the totemic principle or god; and from another, it is also the symbol of a particular society that is called the clan. It is the flag of the clan, the sign by which each clan is distinguished from the others, the visible mark of its distinctiveness, and a mark that is borne by everything that in any way belongs to the clan: men, animals, and things. Thus, if the totem is the symbol of both the god and the society, is this not because the god and the society are one and the same? How could the emblem of the group have taken the form of that quasi-divinity if the group and the divinity were two distinct realities? Thus the god of the clan, the totemic principle, can be none other than the clan itself, but the clan transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal that serves as totem.

How could that apotheosis have come about, and why should it have come about in that fashion?

II

Society in general, simply by its effect on men's minds, undoubtedly has all that is required to arouse the sensation of the divine. A society is to its members what a god is to its faithful.* A god is first of all a being that man conceives of as superior to himself in some respects and one on whom he believes he depends. Whether that being is a conscious personality, like Zeus or Yahweh, or a play of abstract forces as in totemism, the faithful believe

*Le fidèle. To avoid translating this term, which connotes loyal adherence, as "the believer," thereby leaving no room for a contrast with le croyant, which connotes belief, I have usually rendered it as "the faithful." Durkheim analyzes the stance of what one might call the "unbelieving faithful." See Bk. III, chap. 3, §2.

²In the small book cited above, [Julius] Pikler, [*Der Ursprung der Totemismus. Ein Beitrag zur materialistischen Geschichtstheorie*, Berlin, K. Hoffmann, 1900] has already expressed, in a somewhat dialectical fashion, the belief that this fundamentally is what the totem is.

they are bound to certain ways of acting that the nature of the sacred principle they are dealing with has imposed upon them. Society also fosters in us the sense of perpetual dependence. Precisely because society has its own specific nature that is different from our nature as individuals, it pursues ends that are also specifically its own; but because it can achieve those ends only by working through us, it categorically demands our cooperation. Society requires us to make ourselves its servants, forgetful of our own interests. And it subjects us to all sorts of restraints, privations, and sacrifices without which social life would be impossible. And so, at every instant, we must submit to rules of action and thought that we have neither made nor wanted and that sometimes are contrary to our inclinations and to our most basic instincts.

If society could exact those concessions and sacrifices only by physical constraint, it could arouse in us only the sense of a physical force to which we have no choice but to yield, and not that of a moral power such as religions venerate. In reality, however, the hold society has over consciousness owes far less to the prerogative its physical superiority gives it than to the moral authority with which it is invested. We defer to society's orders not simply because it is equipped to overcome our resistance but, first and foremost, because it is the object of genuine respect.

An individual or collective subject is said to inspire respect when the representation that expresses it in consciousness has such power that it calls forth or inhibits conduct automatically, *irrespective of any utilitarian calculation of helpful or harmful results*. When we obey someone out of respect for the moral authority that we have accorded to him, we do not follow his instructions because they seem wise but because a certain psychic energy intrinsic to the idea we have of that person bends our will and turns it in the direction indicated. When that inward and wholly mental pressure moves within us, respect is the emotion we feel. We are then moved not by the advantages or disadvantages of the conduct that is recommended to us or demanded of us but by the way we conceive of the one who recommends or demands that conduct. This is why a command generally takes on short, sharp forms of address that leave no room for hesitation. It is also why, to the extent that command is command and works by its own strength, it precludes any idea of deliberation or calculation, but instead is made effective by the very intensity of the mental state in which it is given. That intensity is what we call moral influence.

The ways of acting to which society is strongly enough attached to impose them on its members are for that reason marked with a distinguishing sign that calls forth respect. Because these ways of acting have been worked out in common, the intensity with which they are thought in each individual mind finds resonance in all the others, and vice versa. The representations

that translate them within each of us thereby gain an intensity that mere private states of consciousness can in no way match. Those ways of acting gather strength from the countless individual representations that have served to form each of them. It is society that speaks through the mouths of those who affirm them in our presence; it is society that we hear when we hear them; and the voice of all itself has a tone that an individual voice cannot have.³ The very forcefulness with which society acts against dissidence, whether by moral censure or physical repression, helps to strengthen this dominance,⁴ and at the same time forcefully proclaims the ardor of the shared conviction. In short, when something is the object of a state of opinion, the representation of the thing that each individual has draws such power from its origins, from the conditions in which it originated, that it is felt even by those who do not yield to it.* The mental representation of a thing that is the object of a state of opinion has a tendency to repress and hold at bay those representations that contradict it; it commands instead those actions that fulfill it. It accomplishes this not by the reality or threat of physical coercion but by the radiation of the mental energy it contains. The hallmark of moral authority is that its psychic properties alone give it power. Opinion, eminently a social thing, is one source of authority. Indeed, the question arises whether authority is not the daughter of opinion.⁵ Some will object that science is often the antagonist of opinion, the errors of which it combats and corrects. But science can succeed in this task only if it has sufficient authority, and it can gain such authority only from opinion itself. All the scientific demonstrations in the world would have no influence if a people had no faith in science. Even today, if it should happen that science resisted a very powerful current of public opinion, it would run the risk of seeing its credibility eroded.⁶

*For example, the thief acknowledges a "state of opinion" by taking precautions not to be discovered. As this example suggests, once upon a time Durkheim's term *opinion* could have been translated as "public opinion" without confusion, but not in America today. Our present usage connotes the discrete bits of "opinion" that pollsters elicit through replies to questionnaires. Trans.

³See my [*De la*] *Division du travail social: Etude sur l'organisation de sociétés supérieures*, 3d ed. [Paris, F. Alcan, 1902], pp. 64ff.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵This is the case at least for all moral authority that is recognized as such by a group.

⁶I hope this analysis and those that follow will put an end to an erroneous interpretation of my ideas, which has more than once led to misunderstanding. Because I have made constraint the *external feature* by which social facts can be most easily recognized and distinguished from individual psychological ones, some have believed that I consider physical constraint to be the entire essence of social life. In reality, I have never regarded constraint as anything more than the visible, tangible expression of an underlying, inner fact that is wholly ideal: *moral authority*. The question for sociology—if there can be said to be one so-

Because social pressure makes itself felt through mental channels, it was bound to give man the idea that outside him there are one or several powers, moral yet mighty, to which he is subject. Since they speak to him in a tone of command, and sometimes even tell him to violate his most natural inclinations, man was bound to imagine them as being external to him. The mythological interpretations would doubtless not have been born if man could easily see that those influences upon him come from society. But the ordinary observer cannot see where the influence of society comes from. It moves along channels that are too obscure and circuitous, and uses psychic mechanisms that are too complex, to be easily traced to the source. So long as scientific analysis has not yet taught him, man is well aware that he is acted upon but not by whom. Thus he had to build out of nothing the idea of those powers with which he feels connected. From this we can begin to perceive how he was led to imagine those powers in forms that are not their own and to transfigure them in thought.

A god is not only an authority to which we are subject but also a force that buttresses our own. The man who has obeyed his god, and who for this reason thinks he has his god with him, approaches the world with confidence and a sense of heightened energy. In the same way, society's workings do not stop at demanding sacrifices, privations, and efforts from us. The force of the collectivity is not wholly external; it does not move us entirely from outside. Indeed, because society can exist only in and by means of individual minds,⁷ it must enter into us and become organized within us. That force thus becomes an integral part of our being and, by the same stroke, uplifts it and brings it to maturity.*

This stimulating and invigorating effect of society is particularly apparent in certain circumstances. In the midst of an assembly that becomes worked

ciological question—is to seek, throughout the various forms of external constraint, the correspondingly various kinds of moral authority and to discover what causes have given rise to the latter. Specifically, the main object of the question treated in the present work is to discover in what form the particular kind of moral authority that is inherent in all that is religious was born, and what it is made of. Further, it will be seen below that in making social pressure one of the distinguishing features of sociological phenomena, I do not mean to say that this is the only one. I will exhibit another aspect of collective life, virtually the opposite of this one, but no less real. (See p. 213.)

* *L'élève et le grandit*. This phrase can also mean "uplifts and enlarges" it. Swain chose the verbs "elevate" and "magnify." Durkheim may have intended both the physical and the moral meanings: "to lift" as well as "to bring up" or "rear"; to "enlarge" as well as to "raise in stature" or "bring to maturity."

⁷Which does not mean, of course, that collective consciousness does not have specific traits (Durkheim, "Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives," *RMM*, vol. VI ([1898]), pp. 273ff.).

up, we become capable of feelings and conduct of which we are incapable when left to our individual resources. When it is dissolved and we are again on our own, we fall back to our ordinary level and can then take the full measure of how far above ourselves we were. History abounds with examples. Suffice it to think about the night of August 4*, when an assembly was suddenly carried away in an act of sacrifice and abnegation that each of its members had refused to make the night before and by which all were surprised the morning after.⁸ For this reason all parties—be they political, economic, or denominational—see to it that periodic conventions are held, at which their followers can renew their common faith by making a public demonstration of it together. To strengthen emotions that would dissipate if left alone, the one thing needful is to bring all those who share them into more intimate and more dynamic relationship.

In the same way, we can also explain the curious posture that is so characteristic of a man who is speaking to a crowd—if he has achieved communion with it. His language becomes high-flown in a way that would be ridiculous in ordinary circumstances; his gestures take on an overbearing quality; his very thought becomes impatient of limits and slips easily into every kind of extreme. This is because he feels filled to overflowing, as though with a phenomenal oversupply of forces that spill over and tend to spread around him. Sometimes he even feels possessed by a moral force greater than he, of which he is only the interpreter. This is the hallmark of what has often been called the demon of oratorical inspiration. This extraordinary surplus of forces is quite real and comes to him from the very group he is addressing. The feelings he arouses as he speaks return to him enlarged and amplified, reinforcing his own to the same degree. The passionate energies that he arouses reecho in turn within him, and they increase his dynamism. It is then no longer a mere individual who speaks but a group incarnated and personified.

Apart from these passing or intermittent states, there are more lasting ones in which the fortifying action of society makes itself felt with longer-term consequences and often with more striking effect. Under the influence

*Durkheim is probably alluding to the night of 4 August 1789, when France's new National Assembly ratified the total destruction of the feudal regime.

⁸The proof of this is the length and passion of the debates at which legal form was given to the resolutions in principle that were taken in a moment of collective enthusiasm. More than one, among clergy and nobility alike, called that famous night "dupes' night," or, with Rivarol, the "Saint Bartholomew's of the landed estates." [This apparently alludes to two events. The *Journée des Dupes* was the day, not the night, of 30 November 1630, when Cardinal Richelieu's enemies came to believe the cardinal had lost the king's ear for good and had fallen in disgrace; they were proved wrong. *La St. Barthélemy* was a massacre of Protestants 23–24 August 1527, which led to civil war. Trans.] See [Otto] Stoll, *Suggestion und Hypnotismus in der Völkerpsychologie*, 2d ed. [Leipzig, Veit, 1904], p. 618 n. 2.

of some great collective shock in certain historical periods, social interactions become much more frequent and active. Individuals seek one another out and come together more. The result is the general effervescence that is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. The result of that heightened activity is a general stimulation of individual energies. People live differently and more intensely than in normal times.* The changes are not simply of nuance and degree; man himself becomes something other than what he was. He is stirred by passions so intense that they can be satisfied only by violent and extreme acts: by acts of superhuman heroism or bloody barbarism. This explains the Crusades,⁹ for example, as well as so many sublime or savage moments in the French Revolution.¹⁰ We see the most mediocre or harmless bourgeois transformed by the general exaltation into a hero or an executioner.¹¹ And the mental processes are so clearly the same as those at the root of religion that the individuals themselves conceived the pressure they yielded to in explicitly religious terms. The Crusaders believed they felt God present among them, calling on them to go forth and conquer the Holy Land, and Joan of Arc believed she was obeying celestial voices.¹²

This stimulating action of society is not felt in exceptional circumstances alone. There is virtually no instant of our lives in which a certain rush of energy fails to come to us from outside ourselves. In all kinds of acts that express the understanding, esteem, and affection of his neighbor, there is a lift that the man who does his duty feels, usually without being aware of it. But that lift sustains him; the feeling society has for him uplifts the feeling he has for himself. Because he is in moral harmony with his neighbor, he gains new confidence, courage, and boldness in action—quite like the man of faith who believes he feels the eyes of his god turned benevolently toward him. Thus is produced what amounts to a perpetual uplift of our moral being. Since it varies according to a multitude of external conditions—whether our relations with the social groups that surround us are more or less active and what those groups are—we cannot help but feel that this moral toning up has an external cause, though we do not see where that cause is or what it is. So we readily conceive of it in the form of a moral power that, while immanent in us, also represents something in us that is other than ourselves. This is

* *On vit plus et autrement qu'en temps normal.*

⁹Ibid., pp. 353ff.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 619, 635.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 622ff.

¹²Feelings of fear or sadness can also develop and intensify under the same influences. As we will see, those feelings correspond to a whole aspect of religious life (Bk. III, chap. 5).

man's moral consciousness and his conscience.* And it is only with the aid of religious symbols that most have ever managed to conceive of it with any clarity at all.

In addition to those free forces that continuously renew our own, there are other forces congealed in the techniques we use and in traditions of all kinds. We speak a language we did not create; we use instruments we did not invent; we claim rights we did not establish; each generation inherits a treasury of knowledge that it did not itself amass; and so on. We owe these varied benefits of civilization to society, and although in general we do not see where they come from, we know at least that they are not of our own making. It is these things that give man his distinctiveness among all creatures, for man is man only because he is civilized. Thus he could not escape the sense of mighty causes existing outside him, which are the source of his characteristic nature and which, like benevolent forces, help and protect him and guarantee him a privileged fate. He naturally accorded to those powers a respect commensurate with the great value of the benefits that he attributed to them.¹³

Thus the environment in which we live seems populated with forces at once demanding and helpful, majestic and kind, and with which we are in touch. Because we feel the weight of them, we have no choice but to locate them outside ourselves, as we do for the objective causes of our sensations. But from another point of view, the feelings they provoke in us are qualitatively different from those we have for merely physical things. So long as these perceptions are no more than the empirical characteristics that ordinary experience makes manifest, and so long as the religious imagination has not yet transfigured them, we feel nothing like respect for them, and they have nothing of what it takes to lift us above ourselves. Therefore the representations that express them seem to us very different from those that collective influences awaken in us. The two sorts of representation form two kinds of mental state, and they are as separate and distinct as the two forms of life to which they correspond. As a result, we feel as though we are in touch with two distinct sorts of reality with a clear line of demarcation between them: the world of profane things on one side, the world of sacred things on the other.

*Conscience. To bring out that the French conscience refers simultaneously to intellectual cognition and moral obligation, I have used both "conscience" and "consciousness."

¹³Such is the other aspect of society, which seems to us demanding as well as good and kindly. It dominates us; it helps us. If I have defined social fact more by the first characteristic than by the second, it is because the dominance is more easily observable and because it is expressed by external and visible signs; but I am far from ever having intended to deny the reality of the second. ([Emile Durkheim,] *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique*, 2d ed. [Paris, Alcan, 1901], preface, p. xx n.1).

Furthermore, now as in the past, we see that society never stops creating new sacred things. If society should happen to become infatuated with a man, believing it has found in him its deepest aspirations as well as the means of fulfilling them, then that man will be put in a class by himself and virtually deified. Opinion will confer on him a grandeur that is similar in every way to the grandeur that protects the gods. This has happened to many sovereigns in whom their epochs had faith and who, if not deified outright, were looked upon as direct representatives of the godhead. A clear indication that this apotheosis is the work of society alone is that society has often consecrated men whose personal worth did not warrant it. Moreover, the routine deference that men invested with high social positions receive is not qualitatively different from religious respect. The same movements express it: standing at a distance from a high personage; taking special precautions in approaching him; using a different language to speak with him and gestures other than those that will do for ordinary mortals. One's feeling in these circumstances is so closely akin to religious feeling that many do not distinguish between them. Sacredness is ascribed to princes, nobles, and political leaders in order to account for the special regard they enjoy. In Melanesia and Polynesia, for example, people say that a man of influence possesses *mana* and impute his influence to this *mana*.¹⁴ It is clear, nonetheless, that his position comes to him only from the importance that opinion gives him. Thus, both the moral power conferred by opinion and the moral power with which sacred beings are invested are of fundamentally the same origin and composed of the same elements. For this reason, one word can be used to designate both.

Just as society consecrates men, so it also consecrates things, including ideas. When a belief is shared unanimously by a people, to touch it—that is, to deny or question it—is forbidden, for the reasons already stated. The prohibition against critique is a prohibition like any other and proves that one is face to face with a sacred thing. Even today, great though the freedom we allow one another may be, it would be tantamount to sacrilege for a man wholly to deny progress or to reject the human ideal to which modern societies are attached. Even the peoples most enamored of free thinking tend to place one principle above discussion and regard it as untouchable, in other words, sacred: the principle of free discussion itself.

Nowhere has society's ability to make itself a god or to create gods been more in evidence than during the first years of the Revolution. In the general enthusiasm of that time, things that were by nature purely secular were

¹⁴[Robert Henry] Codrington, *The Melanesians* [Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1891], pp. 50, 103, 120. Moreover, it is generally believed that in the Polynesian languages, the word *mana* originally meant "authority." (See [Edward] Tregear, *Maori Polynesian Comparative Dictionary*, s.v. [Wellington, Lyon and Blair, 1891].)

transformed by public opinion into sacred things: Fatherland, Liberty, Reason.¹⁵ A religion tended to establish itself spontaneously, with its own dogma,¹⁶ symbols,¹⁷ altars,¹⁸ and feast days.¹⁹ It was to these spontaneous hopes that the Cult of Reason and the Supreme Being tried to give a kind of authoritative fulfillment. Granted, this religious novelty did not last. The patriotic enthusiasm that originally stirred the masses died away,²⁰ and the cause having departed, the effect could not hold. But brief though it was, this experiment loses none of its sociological interest. In a specific case, we saw society and its fundamental ideas becoming the object of a genuine cult directly—and without transfiguration of any kind.

All these facts enable us to grasp how it is possible for the clan to awaken in its members the idea of forces existing outside them, both dominating and supporting them—in sum, religious forces. There is no other social group to which the primitive is more directly or tightly bound. The ties that bind him to the tribe are looser and less strongly felt. Although the tribe is certainly not foreign to him, it is with the people of his clan that he has most in common, and it is the influence of this group that he feels most immediately, and so it is also this influence, more than any other, that was bound to find expression in religious symbols.

This first explanation is too general, though, since it can be applied indiscriminately to any kind of society and hence to any kind of religion. Let us try to specify what particular form collective action takes in the clan and how in the clan it brings about the sense of the sacred, for collective action is nowhere more easily observable or more obvious than in its results.

III

Life in Australian societies alternates between two different phases.²¹ In one phase, the population is scattered in small groups that attend to their occupa-

¹⁵See Albert Mathiez, *Les Origines des cultes révolutionnaires 1789–1792* [Paris, G. Bellais, 1904].

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 29, 32.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁰See [Albert] Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire* [Paris, F. Alcan, 1903], p. 36.

²¹See [Sir Baldwin] Spencer and [Francis James] Gillen, *Northern Tribes [of Central Australia]*, London, Macmillan, 1904], p. 33.

tions independently. Each family lives to itself, hunting, fishing—in short, striving by all possible means to get the food it requires. In the other phase, by contrast, the population comes together, concentrating itself at specified places for a period that varies from several days to several months. This concentration takes place when a clan or a portion of the tribe²² is summoned to come together and on that occasion either conducts a religious ceremony or holds what in the usual ethnographic terminology is called a *corroboree*.²³

These two phases stand in the sharpest possible contrast. The first phase, in which economic activity predominates, is generally of rather low intensity. Gathering seeds or plants necessary for food, hunting, and fishing are not occupations that can stir truly strong passions.²⁴ The dispersed state in which the society finds itself makes life monotonous, slack, and humdrum.²⁵ Everything changes when a corroboree takes place. Since the emotional and passionate faculties of the primitive are not fully subordinated to his reason and will, he easily loses his self-control. An event of any importance immediately puts him outside himself. Does he receive happy news? There are transports of enthusiasm. If the opposite happens, he is seen running hither and yon like a madman, giving way to all sorts of chaotic movements: shouting, screaming, gathering dust and throwing it in all directions, biting himself, brandishing his weapons furiously, and so on.²⁶ The very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once the individuals are gathered together, a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation. Every emotion expressed resonates without interference in consciousnesses that are wide open

²²Indeed there are ceremonies, notably those that take place for initiation, to which members of foreign tribes are summoned. A system of messages and messengers is organized for the purpose of giving the notice that is indispensable for the grand ceremonies. (See [Alfred William] Howitt, "Notes on Australian Message-Sticks and Messengers," *JAI*, vol. XVIII (1889) [pp. 314–334]; Howitt, *Native Tribes [of South-East Australia]*, New York, Macmillan, 1904], pp. 83, 678–691; Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes [of Central Australia]*, London, Macmillan, 1899], p. 159; Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, p. 551.

²³The corroboree is distinguished from a religious rite proper in that it is accessible to women and the uninitiated. But although these two sorts of collective celebrations must be distinguished, they are closely related. I will return to and explain this relationship.

²⁴Except in the case of the large bush-beating hunts.

²⁵"The peaceful monotony of this part of his life," say Spencer and Gillen (*Northern Tribes*, p. 33).

²⁶Howitt, *Native Tribes*, p. 683. Here it is the demonstrations that take place when an embassy sent to a foreign group returns to camp with news of a favorable result. [Durkheim will not be the one to report that the embassy in question had been entrusted to women. Howitt does not say what the women's mission was about. Trans.] Cf. [Robert] Brough Smyth, [*The Aborigines of Victoria*], vol. 1 [Melbourne, J. Ferres, 1878], p. 138; [Reverend Louis] Schulze, "Aborigines of the Upper and Middle Finke River," *RSSA*, vol. XVI [1891], p. 222.

to external impressions, each one echoing the others. The initial impulse is thereby amplified each time it is echoed, like an avalanche that grows as it goes along. And since passions so heated and so free from all control cannot help but spill over, from every side there are nothing but wild movements, shouts, downright howls, and deafening noises of all kinds that further intensify the state they are expressing. Probably because a collective emotion cannot be expressed collectively without some order that permits harmony and unison of movement, these gestures and cries tend to fall into rhythm and regularity, and from there into songs and dances. But in taking on a more regular form, they lose none of their natural fury. A regulated commotion is still a commotion. The human voice is inadequate to the task and is given artificial reinforcement: Boomerangs are knocked against one another; bull roarers are whirled. The original function of these instruments, used widely in the religious ceremonies of Australia, probably was to give more satisfying expression to the excitement felt. And by expressing this excitement, they also reinforce it. The effervescence often becomes so intense that it leads to outlandish behavior; the passions unleashed are so torrential that nothing can hold them. People are so far outside the ordinary conditions of life, and so conscious of the fact, that they feel a certain need to set themselves above and beyond ordinary morality. The sexes come together in violation of the rules governing sexual relations. Men exchange wives. Indeed, sometimes incestuous unions, in normal times judged loathsome and harshly condemned, are contracted in the open and with impunity.²⁷ If it is added that the ceremonies are generally held at night, in the midst of shadows pierced here and there by firelight, we can easily imagine the effect that scenes like these are bound to have on the minds of all those who take part. They bring about such an intense hyperexcitement of physical and mental life as a whole that they cannot be borne for very long. The celebrant who takes the leading role eventually falls exhausted to the ground.²⁸

To illustrate and flesh out this unavoidably sketchy tableau, here is an account of scenes taken from Spencer and Gillen.

One of the most important religious celebrations among the Warra-

²⁷See Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, pp. 96–97, *Northern Tribes*, p. 137; Brough Smyth, *Aborigines of Victoria*, vol. II, p. 319. This ritual promiscuity is practiced especially during initiation ceremonies (Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, pp. 267, 381; Howitt, *Native Tribes*, p. 657) and in totemic ceremonies (Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, pp. 214, 237, 298). The ordinary rules of exogamy are violated during totemic ceremonies. Nevertheless, among the Arunta, unions between father and daughter, son and mother, brothers and sisters (all cases of blood kinship) remain forbidden (Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes* [pp. 96–97]).

²⁸Howitt, *Native Tribes*, pp. 535, 545. This is extremely common.

munga concerns the snake Wollunqua. It is a series of rites that unfold over several days. What I will describe takes place on the fourth day.

According to the protocol in use among the Warramunga, representatives of the two phratries take part, some as celebrants and others as organizers and participants. Although only the people of the Uluuru phratry are authorized to conduct the ceremony, the members of the Kingilli phratry must decorate the participants, prepare the site and the instruments, and serve as the audience. In this capacity, they are responsible for mounding damp sand ahead of time, on which they use red down to make a drawing that represents the snake Wollunqua. The ceremony proper, which Spencer and Gillen attended, did not begin until nightfall. Around ten or eleven o'clock, Uluuru and Kingilli arrived on the scene, sat on the mound, and began to sing. All were in a state of obvious excitement (*"every one was evidently very excited"*). A short time later in the evening, the Uluuru brought their wives and handed them over to the Kingilli,²⁹ who had sexual relations with them. The recently initiated young men were brought in, and the ceremony was explained to them, after which there was uninterrupted singing until three in the morning. Then came a scene of truly wild frenzy (*"a scene of the wildest excitement"*). With fires flickering on all sides, bringing out starkly the whiteness of the gum trees against the surrounding night, the Uluuru knelt in single file beside the mound, then moved around it, rising in unison with both hands on their thighs, kneeling again a little farther along, and so on. At the same time, they moved their bodies left and then right, at each movement letting out an echoing scream—actually a howl—at the top of their voices, *Yrrsh! Yrrsh! Yrrsh!* Meanwhile the Kingilli, in a high state of excitement, sounded their boomerangs, their chief appearing to be even more excited than his companions. When the procession of the Uluuru had circled the mound twice, they rose from their kneeling position, seated themselves, and took to singing again. From time to time, the singing would flag and almost die, then break out suddenly again. At the first sign of day, everyone jumped to their feet; the fires that had gone out were relit; urged on by the Kingilli, the Uluuru furiously attacked the mound with boomerangs, lances, and sticks, and in a few minutes it was in pieces. The fires died and there was profound silence.³⁰

The same observers were present at a yet wilder scene among the Warramunga during the fire rituals. All sorts of processions, dances, and songs had been underway by torchlight since nightfall, and the general efferves-

²⁹Since the women were also Kingilli, these unions violated the rule of exogamy.

³⁰Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, p. 237. [This account begins at p. 231. Trans.]

cence was increasingly intense. At a certain moment, twelve of those present each took in hand a large lighted torch; and, holding his own torch like a bayonette, one of them charged a group of natives. The blows were parried with staves and lances. A general *melée* followed. Men jumped, kicked, reared, and let out wild screams. The torches blazed and crackled as they hit heads and bodies, showering sparks in all directions. "The smoke, the flaming torches, the rain of sparks, the mass of men dancing and screaming—all that, say Spencer and Gillen, created a scene whose wildness cannot be conveyed in words."³¹

It is not difficult to imagine that a man in such a state of exaltation should no longer know himself. Feeling possessed and led on by some sort of external power that makes him think and act differently than he normally does, he naturally feels he is no longer himself. It seems to him that he has become a new being. The decorations with which he is decked out, and the masklike decorations that cover his face, represent this inward transformation even more than they help bring it about. And because his companions feel transformed in the same way at the same moment, and express this feeling by their shouts, movements, and bearing, it is as if he was in reality transported into a special world entirely different from the one in which he ordinarily lives, a special world inhabited by exceptionally intense forces that invade and transform him. Especially when repeated for weeks, day after day, how would experiences like these not leave him with the conviction that two heterogeneous and incommensurable worlds exist in fact? In one world he languidly carries on his daily life; the other is one that he cannot enter without abruptly entering into relations with extraordinary powers that excite him to the point of frenzy. The first is the profane world and the second, the world of sacred things.

It is in these effervescent social milieux, and indeed from that very effervescence, that the religious idea seems to have been born. That such is indeed the origin tends to be confirmed by the fact that what is properly called religious activity in Australia is almost entirely contained within the periods when these gatherings are held. To be sure, there is no people among whom the great cult ceremonies are not more or less periodical, but in the more advanced societies, there is virtually no day on which some prayer or offering is not offered to the gods or on which some ritual obligation is not fulfilled. In Australia, by contrast, the time apart from the feasts of the clan and the

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 391. Other examples of collective effervescence during religious ceremonies are found in Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, pp. 244–246, 356–366, 374, 509–510. (The last occurs during a funeral rite.) Cf. Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, pp. 213, 351.

tribe is taken up almost entirely with secular and profane activities. Granted, even during the periods of secular activity, there are prohibitions that must be and are observed. Freely killing or eating the totemic animal is never permitted, at least where the prohibition has kept its original strictness, but hardly any positive rite or ceremony of any importance is conducted. The positive rites and ceremonies take place only among assembled groups. Thus, the pious life of the Australian moves between successive phases—one of utter colorlessness, one of hyperexcitement—and social life oscillates to the same rhythm. This brings out the link between the two phases. Among the peoples called civilized, on the other hand, the relative continuity between them partially masks their interrelations. Indeed, we may well ask whether this starkness of contrast may have been necessary to release the experience of the sacred in its first form. By compressing itself almost entirely into circumscribed periods, collective life could attain its maximum intensity and power, thereby giving man a more vivid sense of the twofold existence he leads and the twofold nature in which he participates.

But this explanation is still incomplete. I have shown how the clan awakens in its members the idea of external forces that dominate and exalt it by the way in which it acts upon its members. But I still must ask how it happens that those forces were conceived of in the form of the totem, that is, in the form of an animal or plant.

The reason is that some animal or plant has given its name to the clan and serves as the clan's emblem. It is, in fact, a well-known law that the feelings a thing arouses in us are spontaneously transmitted to the symbol that represents it. Black is for us a sign of mourning; therefore it evokes sad thoughts and impressions. This transfer of feelings takes place because the idea of the thing and the idea of its symbol are closely connected in our minds. As a result, the feelings evoked by one spread contagiously to the other. This contagion, which occurs in all cases to some extent, is much more complete and more pronounced whenever the symbol is something simple, well defined, and easily imagined. But the thing itself is difficult for the mind to comprehend—given its dimensions, the number of its parts, and the complexity of their organization. We cannot detect the source of the strong feelings we have in an abstract entity that we can imagine only with difficulty and in a jumbled way. We can comprehend those feelings only in connection with a concrete object whose reality we feel intensely. Thus if the thing itself does not meet this requirement, it cannot serve as a mooring for the impressions felt, even for those impressions it has itself aroused. The symbol thus takes the place of the thing, and the emotions aroused are transferred to the symbol. It is the symbol that is loved, feared, and respected. It

is to the symbol that one is grateful. And it is to the symbol that one sacrifices oneself. The soldier who dies for his flag dies for his country, but the idea of the flag is actually in the foreground of his consciousness. Indeed, the flag sometimes causes action directly. Although the country will not be lost if a solitary flag remains in the hands of the enemy or won if it is regained, the soldier is killed retaking it. He forgets that the flag is only a symbol that has no value in itself but only brings to mind the reality it represents. The flag itself is treated as if it was that reality.

The totem is the flag of the clan, so it is natural that the impressions the clan arouses in individual consciousness—impressions of dependence and of heightened energy—should become more closely attached to the idea of the totem than to that of the clan. The clan is too complex a reality for such unformed minds to be able to bring its concrete unity into clear focus. Besides, the primitive does not see that these impressions come to him from the group. He does not even see that the coming together of a certain number of men participating in the same life releases new energies that transform each one of them. All he feels is that he is lifted above himself and that he is participating in a life different from the one he lives ordinarily. He must still connect those experiences to some external object in a causal relation. Now what does he see around him? What is available to his senses, and what attracts his attention, is the multitude of totemic images surrounding him. He sees the waninga and the nurtunja, symbols of the sacred being. He sees the bull roarers and the churingas, on which combinations of lines that have the same meaning are usually engraved. The decorations on various parts of his body are so many totemic marks. Repeated everywhere and in every form, how could that image not fail to stand out in the mind with exceptionally sharp relief? Thus placed at center stage, it becomes representative. To that image the felt emotions attach themselves, for it is the only concrete object to which they can attach themselves.

The image goes on calling forth and recalling those emotions even after the assembly is over. Engraved on the cult implements, on the sides of rocks, on shields, and so forth, it lives beyond the gathering. By means of it, the emotions felt are kept perpetually alive and fresh. It is as though the image provoked them directly. Imputing the emotions to the image is all the more natural because, being common to the group, they can only be related to a thing that is equally common to all. Only the totemic emblem meets this condition. By definition, it is common to all. During the ceremony, all eyes are upon it. Although the generations change, the image remains the same. It is the abiding element of social life. So the mysterious forces with which men feel in touch seem to emanate from it, and thus we understand how

men were led to conceive them in the form of the animate or inanimate being that gives the clan its name.

Having laid this foundation, we are in a position to grasp the essence of totemic beliefs. Because religious force is none other than the collective and anonymous force of the clan and because that force can only be conceived of in the form of the totem, the totemic emblem is, so to speak, the visible body of the god. From the totem, therefore, the beneficial or fearsome actions that the cult is intended to provoke or prevent will seem to emanate. So it is to the totem that the rites are specifically addressed. This is why the totem stands foremost in the ranks of sacred things.

Like any other society, the clan can only live in and by means of the individual consciousnesses of which it is made. Thus, insofar as religious force is conceived of as embodied in the totemic emblem, it seems to be external to individuals and endowed with a kind of transcendence; and yet, from another standpoint, and like the clan it symbolizes, it can be made real only within and by them. So in this sense, it is immanent in individual members and they of necessity imagine it to be. They feel within themselves the active presence of the religious force, because it is this force that lifts them up to a higher life. This is how man came to believe that he had within him a principle comparable to the one residing in the totem, and thus how he came to impute sacredness to himself—albeit a sacredness less pronounced than that of the emblem. This happens because the emblem is the preeminent source of religious life. Man participates in it only indirectly, and he is aware of that; he realizes that the force carrying him into the realm of sacred things is not inherent in himself but comes to him from outside.

For another reason, the animals or plants of the totemic species had to have the same quality to an even greater degree. For if the totemic principle is none other than the clan, it is the clan thought of in the physical form depicted by the emblem. Now, this is also the form of the real beings whose name the clan bears. Because of this resemblance, they could not fail to arouse feelings similar to those aroused by the emblem itself. Because this emblem is the object of religious respect, they too should inspire respect of the same kind and appear as sacred. Given forms so perfectly identical, the faithful were bound to impute forces of the same kind to both. This is why it is forbidden to kill or eat the totemic animal and why the flesh is deemed to have positive virtues that the rites put to use. The animal looks like the emblem of the clan—like its own image, in other words. And since it looks more like the emblem than the man does, its place in the hierarchy of sacred things is superior to man's. Clearly there is a close kinship between these two beings; both share the same essence, and both incarnate something of the

totemic principle. But because the principle itself is conceived of in animal form, the animal seems to incarnate it more conspicuously than the man does. This is why, if the man respects the animal and treats it as a brother, he gives it at least the respect due an older brother.³²

But although the totemic principle has its chief residence in a specific animal or plant species, it cannot possibly remain localized there. Sacredness is highly contagious,³³ and it spreads from the totemic being to everything that directly or remotely has to do with it. The religious feelings inspired by the animal passed into the substances it ate, thereby making or remaking its flesh and blood; those feelings passed into the things that resemble it and into the various creatures with which it is in constant contact. Thus, little by little, subtotems attached themselves to totems, and the cosmological systems expressed by the primitive classifications came into being. In the end, the whole world was divided up among the totemic principles of the same tribe.

We now understand the source of the ambiguity that religious forces display when they appear in history—how they come to be natural as well as human and material as well as moral. They are moral powers, since they are made entirely from the impressions that moral collectivity as a moral being makes on other moral beings, the individuals. Such moral powers do not express the manner in which natural things affect our senses but the manner in which the collective consciousness affects individual consciousnesses. Their authority is but one aspect of the moral influence that society exerts on its members. From another standpoint, they are bound to be regarded as closely akin to material things³⁴ because they are conceived of in tangible forms. Thus they bestride the two worlds. They reside in men but are at the same time the life-principles of things. It is they that enliven and discipline consciences; it is also they that make the plants grow and the animals multiply. Because of its double nature, religion was able to be the womb in which the

³²It can be seen that this brotherhood, far from being the premise of totemism, is its logical consequence. Men did not come to believe they had duties toward the animals of the totemic species because they believed them to be kin; instead, they imagined that kinship in order to explain the nature of the beliefs and rites of which the animals were the object. The animal was considered man's relative because it was a sacred being like man; it was not treated like a sacred being because people saw him as a relative.

³³See below, Bk. III, chap. 1, §3.

³⁴Furthermore, at the basis of this idea is a well-founded and lasting awareness. Modern science also tends more and more to allow that the duality of man and nature does not preclude their unity, and that, while distinct, physical forces and moral ones are closely akin. We certainly have a different idea of this unity and kinship than the primitive's, but beneath the different symbols, the fact affirmed is the same for both.

principal seeds of human civilization have developed. Because religion has borne reality as a whole within itself, the material world as well as the moral world, the forces that move both bodies and minds have been conceived of in religious form. Thus it is that the most disparate techniques and practices—those that ensure the continuity of moral life (law, morals, fine arts) and those that are useful to material life (natural sciences, industrial techniques)—sprang from religion, directly or indirectly.³⁵

IV

The first religious ideas have often been attributed to feelings of weakness and subjection or fear and misgiving, which supposedly gripped man when he came into contact with the world. The victim of a sort of nightmare fabricated by none other than himself, man imagines himself surrounded by those same hostile and fearsome powers, and appeasing them is the point of the rites. I have just shown that the first religions have an altogether different origin. The famous formula *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor** is in no way warranted by the facts. The primitive did not see his gods as strangers, enemies, or beings who were fundamentally or necessarily evil-minded or whose favor he had to win at all costs. Quite the contrary, to him the gods are friends, relatives, and natural protectors. Are these not the names he gives to the beings of the totemic species? As he imagines it, the power to which the cult is addressed does not loom far above, crushing him with its superiority; instead, it is very near and bestows upon him useful abilities that he is not born with. Never, perhaps, has divinity been closer to man than at this moment in history, when it is present in the things that inhabit his immediate surroundings and, in part, is immanent in man himself. In sum, joyful confidence, rather than terror or constraint, is at the root of totemism.

If we set aside funeral rites, the melancholy aspect of any religion, the totemic cult is celebrated with songs, dances, and dramatic performances. Cruel expiations are relatively rare in it, as we will see; even the painful and obligatory maimings that attend initiation are not of this character. The jealous and terrible gods do not make their appearance until later in religious

*First in the world, fear created the gods.

³⁵I say that this derivation is sometimes indirect, because of techniques that, in the great majority of cases, seem to be derived from religion only via magic (see [Henri] Hubert and [Marcel] Mauss, [*Esquisse d'une*] *Théorie générale de la magie*, AS, vol. VII [1904], pp. 144ff; magic forces are, I think, only a special form of religious forces. I will have occasion to return more than once to this point.

evolution. This is so because primitive societies are not Leviathans that overwhelm man with the enormity of their power and subject him to harsh discipline;³⁶ he surrenders to them spontaneously and without resistance. Since the social soul is at that time made up of only a small number of ideas and feelings, the whole of it is incarnated without difficulty in each individual's consciousness. Each individual carries the whole in himself. It is part of him, so when he yields to its promptings, he does not think he is yielding to coercion but instead doing what his own nature tells him to do.³⁷

This way of understanding the origin of religious thought escapes the objections that the most respected classical theories are open to.

We have seen that the naturists and the animists purported to construct the notion of sacred beings from the sensations that various physical or biological phenomena evoke in us. I have shown what was impossible and even contradictory about this enterprise. Nothing comes out of nothing. The sensations that the physical world evokes in us cannot, by definition, contain anything that goes beyond that world. From something tangible one can only make something tangible; from extended substance one cannot make unextended substance.* So to be in a position to explain how, under those conditions, the notion of the sacred could have been formed, most theorists were forced to assume that man has superimposed an unreal world upon reality as reality is available to observation. And this unreal world is constructed entirely with the phantasms that agitate his spirit during dreams, or with the often monstrous derangements that, supposedly, the mythological imagination spawned under the deceptive, if seductive, influence of language. But it then became impossible to understand why humanity should have persisted for centuries in errors that experience would very quickly have exposed as such.

From my standpoint, these difficulties disappear. Religion ceases to be an inexplicable hallucination of some sort and gains a foothold in reality. Indeed, we can say that the faithful are not mistaken when they believe in the existence of a moral power to which they are subject and from which they

* *L'étendu* and *l'inétendu*. Literally, "something extended" and "something unextended," which correspond to Descartes' opposition between *res extensa* and *res inextensa*, classically the opposition between mind (or soul) and body.

³⁶In any case, once he is adult and fully initiated. The rites of initiation, which introduce the young man into social life, in themselves constitute a harsh discipline.

³⁷Concerning the specific nature of primitive societies, see [Durkheim,] *Division du travail social*, pp. 123, 149, 173ff.

receive what is best in themselves. That power exists, and it is society. When the Australian is carried above himself, feeling inside a life overflowing with an intensity that surprises him, he is not the dupe of an illusion. That exaltation is real and really is the product of forces outside of and superior to the individual. Of course, he is mistaken to believe that a power in the form of an animal or plant has brought about this increase in vital energy. But his mistake lies in taking literally the symbol that represents this being in the mind, or the outward appearance in which the imagination has dressed it up, not in the fact of its very existence. Behind these forms, be they cruder or more refined, there is a concrete and living reality.

In this way, religion acquires a sense and a reasonableness that the most militant rationalist cannot fail to recognize. The main object of religion is not to give man a representation of the natural universe, for if that had been its essential task, how it could have held on would be incomprehensible. In this respect, it is barely more than a fabric of errors. But religion is first and foremost a system of ideas by means of which individuals imagine the society of which they are members and the obscure yet intimate relations they have with it. Such is its paramount role. And although this representation is symbolic and metaphorical, it is not unfaithful. It fully translates the essence of the relations to be accounted for. It is true with a truth that is eternal that there exists outside us something greater than we and with which we commune.

That is why we can be certain that acts of worship, whatever they may be, are something other than paralyzed force, gesture without motion. By the very act of serving the manifest purpose of strengthening the ties between the faithful and their god—the god being only a figurative representation of the society—they at the same time strengthen the ties between the individual and the society of which he is a member. We can even understand how the fundamental truth that religion thus contained might have been enough to offset the secondary errors that it almost necessarily entailed and therefore how, despite the unpleasant surprises those errors caused, the faithful were prevented from setting religion aside. More often than not, the prescriptions it counseled for man's use upon things must surely have proved ineffective. But these setbacks could not have profound influence, because they did not strike at what is fundamental to religion.³⁸

Nonetheless, it will be objected that even in terms of this hypothesis, religion is still the product of a certain delusion. By what other name can one

³⁸Since I will return to this idea and will argue the case more explicitly in treating the rites (Bk. III), for now I confine myself to this general indication.

call the state in which men find themselves when, as a result of collective effervescence, they believe they have been swept up into a world entirely different from the one they have before their eyes?

It is quite true that religious life cannot attain any degree of intensity and not carry with it a psychic exaltation that is connected to delirium. It is for this reason that men of extraordinarily sensitive religious consciousness—prophets, founders of religions, great saints—often show symptoms of an excitability that is extreme and even pathological: These physiological defects predisposed them to great religious roles. The ritual use of intoxicating liquors is to be understood in the same way.³⁹ The reason is certainly not that ardent faith is necessarily the fruit of drunkenness and mental disorders. However, since experience quickly taught people the resemblances between the mentalities of the delusive and of the seer, they sought to open a path to the second by producing the first artificially. If, for this reason, it can be said that religion does not do without a certain delirium, it must be added that a delirium with the causes I have attributed to it is *well founded*. The images of which it is made are not pure illusions, and unlike those the naturists and the animists put at the basis of religion, they correspond to something real. Doubtless, it is the nature of moral forces expressed merely by images that they cannot affect the human mind with any forcefulness without putting it outside itself, and plunging it into a state describable as “ecstatic” (so long as the word is taken in its etymological sense [ἐκστασις, “stand” plus “out of”]). But it by no means follows that these forces are imaginary. Quite the contrary, the mental excitement they bring about attests to their reality. It provides further evidence that a very intense social life always does a sort of violence to the individual’s body and mind and disrupts their normal functioning. This is why it can last for only a limited time.⁴⁰

What is more, if the name “delirium” is given to any state in which the mind adds to whatever is immediately given through the senses, projecting its own impressions onto it, there is perhaps no collective representation that is not in a sense delusive; religious beliefs are only a special case of a very general law. The whole social world seems populated with forces that in reality exist only in our minds. We know what the flag is for the soldier, but in itself it is only a bit of cloth. Human blood is only an organic liquid, yet even

³⁹On this point see [Thomas] Achelis, *Die Ekstase [in ihrer kulturellen Bedeutung]*, Berlin, J. Rade, 1902], esp. chap. 1.

⁴⁰Cf. [Marcel] Mauss, “Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés eskimos,” in *AS*, vol. IX, [1906], p. 127.

today we cannot see it flow without experiencing an acute emotion that its physicochemical properties cannot explain. From a physical point of view, man is nothing but a system of cells, and from the mental point of view, a system of representations. From both points of view, he differs from the animal only in degree. And yet society conceives him and requires that we conceive him as being endowed with a *sui generis* character that insulates and shields him from all reckless infringement—in other words, that imposes respect. This status, which puts him in a class by himself, seems to us to be one of his distinctive attributes, even though no basis for it can be found in the empirical nature of man. A cancelled postage stamp may be worth a fortune, but obviously that value is in no way entailed by its natural properties. There is a sense, of course, in which our representation of the external world is itself nothing but a fabric of hallucinations. The odors, tastes, and colors that we place in bodies are not there, or at least are not there in the way we perceive them. Nevertheless, our sensations of smell, taste, and sight do correspond to certain objective states of the things represented. After a fashion, they do express the properties of particular materials or movements of the ether that really do have their origin in the bodies we perceive as being fragrant, tasty, or colorful. But collective representations often impute to the things to which they refer properties that do not exist in them in any form or to any degree whatsoever. From the most commonplace object, they can make a sacred and very powerful being.

However, even though purely ideal, the powers thereby conferred on that object behave as if they were real. They determine man's conduct with the same necessity as physical forces. The Arunta who has properly rubbed himself with his churinga feels stronger; he is stronger. If he has eaten the flesh of an animal that is prohibited, even though it is perfectly wholesome, he will feel ill from it and may die. The soldier who falls defending his flag certainly does not believe he has sacrificed himself to a piece of cloth. Such things happen because social thought, with its imperative authority, has a power that individual thought cannot possibly have. By acting on our minds, it can make us see things in the light that suits it; according to circumstances, it adds to or takes away from the real. Hence, there is a realm of nature in which the formula of idealism is almost literally applicable; that is the social realm. There, far more than anywhere else, the idea creates the reality. Even in this case, idealism is probably not true without qualification. We can never escape the duality of our nature and wholly emancipate ourselves from physical necessities. As I will show, to express our own ideas even to ourselves, we need to attach those ideas to material things that symbolize them. But, here, the role of matter is at a minimum. The object that serves as a prop for the

idea does not amount to much as compared to the ideal superstructure under which it disappears, and, furthermore, it has nothing to do with that superstructure. From all that has been said, we see what the pseudo-delirium met with at the basis of so many collective representations consists of: It is only a form of this fundamental idealism.⁴¹ So it is not properly called a delusion. The ideas thus objectified are well founded—not, to be sure, in the nature of the tangible things onto which they are grafted but in the nature of society.

We can understand now how it happens that the totemic principle and, more generally, how any religious force comes to be external to the things in which it resides:⁴² because the idea of it is not at all constructed from the impressions the thing makes directly on our senses and minds. Religious force is none other than the feeling that the collectivity inspires in its members, but projected outside the minds that experience them, and objectified. To become objectified, it fixes on a thing that thereby becomes sacred; any object can play this role. In principle, none is by nature predestined to it, to the exclusion of others, any more than others are necessarily precluded from it.⁴³ Where religious force becomes objectified depends entirely upon what circumstances cause the feeling that generates religious ideas to settle here or there, in one place rather than another. The sacredness exhibited by the thing is not implicated in the intrinsic properties of the thing: *It is added to them*. The world of the religious is not a special aspect of empirical nature: *It is superimposed upon nature*.

Finally, this idea of the religious enables us to explain an important principle found at the root of many myths: When a sacred being is subdivided, it remains wholly equal to itself in each of its parts. In other words, from the standpoint of religious thought, the part equals the whole; the part has the same powers and the same efficacy. A fragment of a relic has the same virtues

⁴¹One can see all that is wrong in theories like the geographic materialism of [Friedrich] Ratzel (see especially his "Der Raum im Geist der Völker" in *Politische Geographie*, [Leipzig, R. Oldenbourg, 1897]), which aim to derive all of social life from its material substrate (either economic or territorial). Their mistake is comparable to Maudsley's in individual psychology. Just as Maudsley reduced the psychic life of the individual to a mere epiphenomenon of its physiological base, they want to reduce all of the psychic life of the collectivity to its physical base. This is to forget that ideas are realities—forces—and that collective representations are forces even more dynamic and powerful than individual representations. On this point, see [Durkheim], "Représentations," *RMM*, 1898.

⁴²See pp. 191, 196–197.

⁴³Even excrement has a religious quality. See [Konrad Theodor] Preuss, "Der Ursprung der Religion und Kunst," esp. chap. 2, "Der Zauber der Defäkation," *Globus*, vol. LXXXVI [1904], pp. 325ff.

as the whole relic. The smallest drop of blood contains the same active principle as all the blood. As we will see, the soul can be broken up into almost as many parts as there are organs or tissues in the body; each of these partial souls is equivalent to the entire soul. This conception would be inexplicable if sacredness depended on the constitutive properties of the thing serving as its substrate, for sacredness would have to change with that thing, increasing and decreasing with it. But if the virtues the thing is deemed to have are not intrinsic to it, if they come to it from certain feelings that it calls to mind and symbolizes (even though such feelings originate outside it), it can play an evocative role whether it is whole or not, since in that role it does not need specific dimensions. Since the part evokes the whole, it also evokes the same feelings as the whole. A mere scrap of the flag represents the country as much as the flag itself; moreover, it is sacred in the same right and to the same degree.⁴⁴

V

This theory of totemism has enabled us to explain the most characteristic beliefs of the religion, but it rests on a fact that is not yet explained. Given the idea of the totem, the emblem of the clan, all the rest follows, but we must still find out how that idea was formed. The question is twofold and can be broken down in this way: (1) What caused the clan to choose an emblem? (2) Why were those emblems taken from the world of animals and plants, but especially from the world of animals?

That an emblem can be useful as a rallying point for any sort of group requires no argument. By expressing the social unit tangibly, it makes the unit itself more tangible to all. And for that reason, the use of emblematic symbols must have spread quickly, as soon as the idea was born. Furthermore, this idea must have arisen spontaneously from the conditions of life in common, for the emblem is not only a convenient method of clarifying the awareness the society has of itself: It serves to create—and is a constitutive element of—that awareness.

By themselves, individual consciousnesses are actually closed to one another, and they can communicate only by means of signs in which their inner states come to express themselves. For the communication that is opening up between them to end in a communion—that is, in a fusion of all

⁴⁴This principle has passed from religion into magic. It is the alchemists' *Totum ex parte* [the whole from the part. Trans.].

the individual feelings into a common one—the signs that express those feelings must come together in one single resultant.* The appearance of this resultant notifies individuals that they are in unison and brings home to them their moral unity. It is by shouting the same cry, saying the same words, and performing the same action in regard to the same object that they arrive at and experience agreement. Granted, individual representations also bring about repercussions in the body that are not unimportant; still, these effects can be treated as analytically distinct from physical repercussions that come with or after them but that are not their basis.

Collective representations are quite another matter. They presuppose that consciousnesses are acting and reacting on each other; they result from actions and reactions that are possible only with the help of tangible intermediaries. Thus the function of the intermediaries is not merely to reveal the mental state associated with them; they also contribute to its making. The individual minds can meet and commune only if they come outside themselves, but they do this only by means of movement. It is the homogeneity of these movements that makes the group aware of itself and that, in consequence, makes it be. Once this homogeneity has been established and these movements have taken a definite form and been stereotyped, they serve to symbolize the corresponding representations. But these movements symbolize those representations only because they have helped to form them.

Without symbols, moreover, social feelings could have only an unstable existence. Those feelings are very strong so long as men are assembled, mutually influencing one another, but when the gathering is over, they survive only in the form of memories that gradually dim and fade away if left to themselves. Since the group is no longer present and active, the individual temperaments quickly take over again. Wild passions that could unleash themselves in the midst of a crowd cool and die down once the crowd has dispersed, and individuals wonder with amazement how they could let themselves be carried so far out of character. But if the movements by which these feelings have been expressed eventually become inscribed on things that are durable, then they too become durable. These things keep bringing the feelings to individual minds and keep them perpetually aroused, just as

*Since Durkheim said "resultant" (*résultante*) and not "result" (*résultat*), he may have had in mind the mathematical notion of a vector sum of forces. A resultant may be defined as the single force, measured as velocity or acceleration, to which several forces taken together are equivalent. The term also has an analogous literary sense.

would happen if the cause that first called them forth was still acting. Thus, while emblemizing is necessary if society is to become conscious of itself, so is it no less indispensable in perpetuating that consciousness.

Hence, we must guard against seeing those symbols as mere artifices—a variety of labels placed on ready-made representations to make them easier to handle. They are integral to those representations. The fact that collective feelings find themselves joined in this way to things that are alien to them is not purely conventional. It tangibly portrays a real feature of social phenomena: their transcendence of individual consciousnesses. We know, in fact, that social phenomena are born not in the individual but in the group. No matter what part we may play in their genesis, each of us receives them from without.⁴⁵ Thus, when we imagine them as emanating from a material object, we are not entirely wrong about their nature. Although they certainly do not come from the specific thing to which we attribute them, still it is true that they originate outside us. And although the moral force that sustains the worshipper does not come from the idol he worships or the emblem he venerates, still it is external to him; and he feels this. The objectivity of the symbol is but an expression of that externality.

Thus, in all its aspects and at every moment of its history, social life is only possible thanks to a vast symbolism. The physical emblems and figurative representations with which I have been especially concerned in the present study are one form of it, but there are a good many others. Collective feelings can just as well be incarnated in persons as in formulas. Some formulas are flags; some real or mythic personages are symbols. But there is one sort of emblem that must have appeared very quickly, quite apart from any reflection or calculation, and it is this one that we have seen playing a considerable role in totemism: tattooing. Well-known facts demonstrate, in fact, that under certain conditions, it is produced by a sort of automatic action. When men of an inferior culture share in a common life, they are often led, almost instinctively, to paint themselves or to imprint images on their bodies that remind them of their common life. According to a text by Procope, the first Christians had the name of Christ or the sign of the cross imprinted on their skin.⁴⁶ For a long time, groups of pilgrims who went to Palestine also had themselves tattooed on their arms or wrists with designs representing the

⁴⁵On this point, see [Durkheim], *Règles de la méthode sociologique*, pp. 5ff.

⁴⁶Procopius of Gaza, *Commentarii in Isaia*, p. 496. [It may be that Durkheim drew this fifth-century reference from *Procopii Gazaei . . . Opera omnia in unum corpus adunata*, Petit Montrouge, J. P. Migne, 1861. Trans.]

cross or the monogram of Christ.⁴⁷ The same custom is reported for pilgrimages to certain holy places in Italy.⁴⁸ Lombroso reported a curious example of spontaneous tattooing. When twenty young men from an Italian high school were about to separate, they had themselves decorated with tattoos that in various ways recorded the years they had just spent together.⁴⁹ The same practice has often been observed among soldiers of the same camp, sailors on the same ship, and prisoners in the same house of detention.⁵⁰ In fact, it is understandable, especially where technology is still undeveloped, that tattooing is the most direct and expressive means by which the communion of minds can be affirmed. The best way of testifying to oneself and others that one is part of the same group is to place the same distinctive mark on the body. Proof that such is indeed the *raison d'être* of the totemic image is that, as I have shown, it does not try to copy the appearance of the thing it is considered to represent. It is made of lines and points that are given an entirely conventional meaning.⁵¹ The purpose of the image is not to represent or evoke a particular object but to testify that a certain number of individuals share the same moral life.

The clan is a society that is less able than any other to do without an emblem and a symbol, for there are few societies so lacking in cohesion. The clan cannot be defined by its leader, for although not absent altogether, central authority in it is at best shifting and unstable.⁵² Nor can it be any better defined by the territory it occupies for, being nomadic,⁵³ the clan's population is not closely tied to any definite locality. Furthermore, given the rule of exogamy, the husband and wife must be of different totems. Thus, where the totem is transmitted in the maternal line—and today this descent system is

⁴⁷See Thévenot, [*Suite de*] *voyage [de M. de Thévenot] au Levant*, Paris, 1689, p. 638. This phenomenon was observed again in 1862: cf. Berchon, "Histoire médicale du tatouage," *Archives de Médecine Navale*, vol. XI (1869), p. 377 n.

⁴⁸[Alexandre] Lacassagne, *Les Tatouages: [Étude anthropologique et médico légale]*, Paris, Baillière, 1881], p. 10.

⁴⁹[Césaire] Lombroso, *L'Homme criminel*, vol. I [Paris, Alcan, 1885], p. 292.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 268, 285, 291–292; Lacassagne, *Tatouages*, p. 97.

⁵¹See above, p. 126.

⁵²On the authority of the chiefs, see Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, p. 10; Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, p. 25; Howitt, *Native Tribes*, pp. 295ff.

⁵³At least in Australia. In America, the population is most often sedentary, but the clan in America is a relatively advanced form of organization.

still the most widespread⁵⁴—the children are of a different clan from their father, even when living with him. For all these reasons, we find all sorts of different clans represented within the same family and even within the same locality. The unity of the group can be felt only because of the collective name borne by all the members and because of the equally collective emblem representing the thing designated by that name. A clan is essentially a company of individuals who have the same name and rally around the same symbol. Take away the name and the symbol that gives it tangible form, and the clan can no longer even be imagined. Since the clan was possible only on condition of being imaginable, both the institution of the emblem and its place in the group's life are thus explained.

Still, we must find out why these names and emblems were taken almost exclusively from the animal and plant kingdoms, though mainly from the first.

It seems plausible that the emblem has played a more important role than the name. In any event, today the written sign still holds a more central place in the life of the clan than the spoken one. Now, the emblematic image called for a subject representable by a design. And besides, the things had to be from among those with which the men of the clan were most closely and habitually in contact. Animals met this condition best. For these hunting and fishing populations, animals were in fact the essential element of the economic environment. In this respect, plants took second place, for they are of only secondary importance as food so long as they are not cultivated. Besides, animals have a closer relationship to man's life than do plants, if only because of the kindred nature that joins these two creatures to one another. By contrast, the sun, moon, and stars were too far away and seemed to belong to a different world.⁵⁵ Further, since the constellations were not differentiated and classified, the starry sky did not present objects different enough from one another to be serviceable in designating all the clans and subclans of a tribe. On the other hand, the variety of the flora, and especially the fauna,

⁵⁴To be convinced of this, it is enough to look at the map prepared by [Northcote Whitridge] Thomas in *Kinship [Organization and Group] Marriage in Australia* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1906], p. 40. To evaluate this map properly, we must take into account the fact that, for reasons unknown, the author has extended the system of totemic descent through the paternal line as far as the west coast of Australia, even though we have virtually no information about the tribes of this region (and which, besides, is mainly desert).

⁵⁵As I will show in the next chapter, the stars are often considered, even by the Australians, as countries of souls or mythic personages—that is, they seem to constitute a world very different from that of the living.

was almost inexhaustible. For these reasons, the heavenly bodies were unsuited to the role of totems, notwithstanding their brilliance and the powerful impression they make upon the senses. Animals and plants were perfect for it.

An observation by Strehlow permits us to specify the manner in which these emblems were probably chosen. He reports having noticed that the totemic centers are most often situated near a mountain, spring, or gorge where the animals that serve as the group's totem are found in abundance, and he cites various examples.⁵⁶ These totemic centers are certainly the consecrated places where the clan held its meetings. It therefore seems likely that each group took as its emblem the animal or plant that was the most plentiful in the neighborhood of the place where it usually assembled.⁵⁷

VI

This theory of totemism will provide us the key to a curious trait of the human mind that, although more pronounced long ago than now, has not disappeared and in any case has played a significant role in the history of thought. This will be yet another opportunity to observe that logical evolution is closely interconnected with religious evolution and, like religious evolution, depends upon social conditions.⁵⁸

If there is a truth that today seems to us completely self-evident, it is this: Beings that differ not only in outward appearance but also in their most fundamental properties—such as minerals, plants, animals, and men—cannot be regarded as equivalent and interchangeable. Long-established practice, which scientific culture has rooted even more deeply in our minds, taught us to set up barriers between realms of nature, barriers whose existence even trans-

⁵⁶[Carl Strehlow, *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral Australien*], vol. 1 [Frankfurt, J. Baer, 1907], p. 4. Cf. along the same lines Schulze, "Aborigines of the . . . Finke River," p. 243.

⁵⁷Of course, as I have already had occasion to show (see p. 156, above), this choice is not made without a more or less well-thought-out agreement among the different groups, since each of them had to adopt a different emblem from that of its neighbors.

⁵⁸The turn of mind treated in this paragraph is identical to the one that [Lucien] Lévy-Bruhl calls the law of participation (*Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* [Paris, Alcan, 1910], pp. 76ff.). These pages were already written when that work appeared; I publish them in their original form without any change but confine myself to adding certain explanations that indicate where I differ with Lévy-Bruhl in the evaluation of the evidence.

formism* does not deny. For although transformism grants that life could have been born from nonliving matter, and men from animals, it recognizes nonetheless that, once formed, living beings are different from minerals, and men from animals. Within each realm, the same barriers separate different classes. We cannot imagine how one mineral could have the distinctive characteristics of another mineral—or one animal species, those of another species. But these distinctions, which seem to us so natural, are not at all primitive. Originally, all the realms are merged. The rocks have a sex; they have the ability to procreate; the sun, moon, and stars are men and women, who feel and express human feelings, while humans are pictured as animals or plants. This merging is found again and again at the basis of all mythologies. From it arises the ambiguous nature of the beings that figure in myths. Those beings cannot be placed in any definite genus because they simultaneously participate in the most dissimilar ones. Moreover, it is conceded without difficulty that they can move from one into another, and it is through transmutations of this kind that men long believed they could explain the origins of things.

That the anthropomorphic instinct, with which the animists have endowed the primitive, cannot account for this turn of mind is shown by the nature of the errors that are typical of it. These errors arise not from man's having wildly expanded the human realm to the point of encompassing all the others but from his having merged the most disparate realms with one another. He has no more imagined the world in his own image than he has imagined himself in the image of the world. He has done both at once. In the way he thought about things, he of course included human elements, but in the way he thought about himself, he included elements that came to him from things.

However there was nothing in experience that could have suggested these mergers and mixtures to him. From the standpoint of observation

*The 1992 *Petit Robert* dictionary indicates a "scientific" term, *transformisme*, and a "philosophical" term, *évolutionnisme*, dating them, respectively, from 1867 and 1878. Both terms come after Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859). According to André Lalande (*Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, Paris, Alcan, 1902, p. 909), the difference between the two terms is as follows. In one sense, *transformisme* is a more general term in biology than *évolutionnisme*, because it also includes such notions as Lamarck's inheritance of acquired characteristics. In another sense, it is more specific than evolutionism because it is limited to biology, whereas evolutionism became a far more general philosophical notion considered to be applicable to all phenomena. It is clear from the context of the book as a whole that, in these terms, Durkheim had *évolutionnisme* in mind. But I have preserved his "transformism" so as not to obliterate the memory of two overlapping terms that had somewhat different, and no doubt contested, meaning in his day.

through the senses, everything is disparate and discontinuous. Nowhere in reality do we observe beings that merge their natures and change into one another. An exceptionally powerful cause would have had to intervene and so transfigure the real as to make it appear in a form not its own.

It is religion that carried out this transformation; it is religious beliefs that replaced the world as the senses perceive it with a different one. This, the case of totemism shows very well. What is fundamental to totemism is that the people of the clan, and the various beings whose form the totemic emblem represents, are held to be made of the same essence. Once that belief was accepted, the disparate realms were bridged. Man was conceived of as a kind of animal or plant, and the plants and animals as man's kin—or, rather, all these beings, so different according to the senses, were conceived of as participating in the same nature. Hence, the origin of that remarkable capacity to confound what seems to us so obviously distinct: The first forces with which the human intellect populated the universe were elaborated through religion. Since these forces were made of elements taken from different kingdoms, they became the principle common to the most disparate things, which were thereby endowed with one and the same essence.

We know furthermore that these religious ideas are the outcome of definite social causes. Because the clan cannot exist without a name and an emblem, and because that emblem is everywhere before the eyes of individuals, the feelings that society arouses in its members are directed toward the emblem and toward the objects whose image it is. In this way, men had no choice but to conceive the collective force, whose workings they felt, in the form of the thing that served as the flag of the group. Therefore, the most disparate realms found themselves merged in the idea of this force. In one sense, the force was fundamentally human, since it was made of human ideas and feelings; at the same time, it could not but appear as closely akin to the animate or inanimate being that gave it outward form. The cause we are capturing at work is not exclusive to totemism; there is no society in which it is not at work. Nowhere can a collective feeling become consciousness of itself without fixing upon a tangible object;⁵⁹ but by that very fact, it participates in the nature of that object, and vice versa. Thus, it is social requirements that have fused together ideas that at first glance seem distinct, and through the great mental effervescence that it brings about, social life has promoted that fusion.⁶⁰ This is further evidence that logical understanding is a function of

⁵⁹See above, p. 231.

⁶⁰Another cause accounts for a large part of this fusion: the extreme contagiousness of religious forces. They invade every object in their reach, whatever it may be. Hence the same religious force can animate

society, since logical understanding adopts the conventions and viewpoints that society imprints upon it.

This logic is unsettling, to be sure. Still, we must be careful not to depreciate it: However crude it may seem to us, it was a momentous contribution to the intellectual development of humanity. For through that logic, a first explanation of the world became possible. Of course, the mental habits it implies prevented man from seeing reality as his senses show it to him; but as the senses show it to him, reality has the grave disadvantage of being resistant to all explanation. For to explain is to connect things to other things; it is to establish relationships between things that make them appear to us as functions of one another and as vibrating sympathetically in accordance with an internal law that is rooted in their nature. Sense perception, which sees only from the outside, could not possibly cause us to discover such relationships and internal ties; only the intellect can create the notion of them. When I learn that A regularly precedes B, my knowledge is enriched with a new piece of knowledge, but my intelligence is in no way satisfied by an observation that does not carry a reason with it. I begin to *understand* only if it is possible for me to conceive of B in some way that makes it appear to me as not foreign to A but as united with A in some relation of kinship. The great service that religions have rendered to thought is to have constructed a first representation of what the relations of kinship between things might be. Given the conditions in which it was tried, that enterprise could obviously lead only to makeshift results. But, then, are the results of any such enterprise ever definitive, and must it not be taken up again and again? Furthermore, it was less important to succeed than to dare. What was essential was not to let the mind be dominated by what appears to the senses, but instead to teach the mind to dominate it and to join together what the senses put asunder. As soon as man became aware that internal connections exist between things, science and philosophy became possible. Religion made a way for them. It is because religion is a social thing that it could play this role. To make men take control of sense impressions and replace them with a new way of imagining the real, a new kind of thought had to be created: collective thought. If collective thought alone had the power to achieve this, here is the reason: Creating a whole world of ideals, through which the world of sensed realities seemed transfigured, would require a hyperexcitation of intellectual forces that is possible only in and through society.

the most dissimilar things, which by that very fact find themselves closely connected and classified in the same genus. I will return to this contagion below, while showing that it is related to the social origins of the idea of the sacred (Bk. III, chap. 1, end).

Hence, that mentality is far from being unrelated to our own. Our own logic was born in that logic. The explanations of contemporary science are more certain of being objective, because they are more systematic and based on more rigorously controlled observations, but they are not different in nature from those that satisfy primitive thought. Today as in the past, to explain is to show how a thing participates in one or several other things. It has been said that the participations whose existence mythologies presuppose violate the principle of contradiction and, on those grounds, are antithetical to the participations that scientific explanations involve.⁶¹ Is not postulating that a man is a kangaroo and the sun a bird identifying one thing with another? We do not think any differently when we say of heat that it is a movement, and of light that it is a vibration of the ether, and so on. Every time we join heterogeneous terms by an internal tie, we of necessity identify contraries. The terms we join in this way are not, of course, the ones the Australian joins. We choose them according to different criteria and for different reasons, but the procedure by which the mind places them into relationship is not essentially different.

Granted, if primitive thought had the sort of universal and abiding indifference to contradiction that has been ascribed to it,⁶² on this point it would contrast—and contrast very markedly—with modern thought, which is always careful to remain internally consistent. But I do not believe it possible to characterize the mentality of the lower societies by a sort of one-sided and exclusive inclination not to make distinctions. If the primitive puts together things that we keep separate, inversely, he separates other things that we put together, and he actually conceives of those distinctions as abrupt and pronounced oppositions. Between two beings that are classified in two different phratries, there is not only separation but also antagonism.⁶³ For this reason, the same Australian who puts the sun and the white cockatoo together opposes the black cockatoo to the white as to its opposite. The two seem to him to belong to two separate genera with nothing in common. There is an even more pronounced opposition between sacred and profane things. They repel and contradict one another so forcefully that the mind refuses to think of them at the same time. They expel one another from consciousness.

Hence, there is no gulf between the logic of religious thought and the logic of scientific thought. Both are made up of the same essential elements,

⁶¹Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales*, pp. 77ff.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶³See above, p. 146.

although these elements are unequally and differently developed. What appears above all to typify the logic of religious thought is a natural taste as much for unrestrained assimilations as for clashing contrasts. It is given to excess in both directions. When it brings things together, it mixes them together; when it distinguishes between things, it makes them opposites. It knows neither moderation nor nuance but seeks the extremes. As a result, it employs logical mechanisms with a certain gaucheness, but none of them are unknown to it.