One reason for the superficial volatility of some modern societies is to be traced to the prevalence of direct representation in the electoral system, which chains elected representatives closely to the whims of the electorate. This could be overcome by the establishment of a two-stage or multiple-level electoral system, in which the occupational groups would serve as the main intermediary electoral units.

These proposals, according to Durkheim, are not mere wishful thinking, but conform to his specification of the determination of 'normal' social forms set out in *The Rules*. That is to say, the development of the occupational groups is an emergent principle of the complex division of labour.

> The absence of all corporative institution creates, then, in the organisation of a people like ours, a void whose importance it is difficult to exaggerate. It is a whole system of organs necessary in the normal functioning of the common life which is wanting... Where the State is the only environment in which men can live communal lives, they inevitably lose contact, become detached, and thus society disintegrates. A nation can be maintained only if, between the State and the individual, there is intercalated a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them, in this way, into the general torrent of social life. We have just shown how occupational groups are suited to fill this role, and that is their destiny.[31]

[31] *DL*, pp. 29 & 28. cf. Erik Allardt: 'Emile Durkheim: sein Beitrag zur politischen Soziologie', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, vol. 20, 1968, pp. 1–16.

8. Religion and moral discipline

In his earliest writings Durkheim comments upon the importance of religion in society, recognising it to be the original source of all subsequently evolved moral, philosophical, scientific and juridical ideas. In *The Division of Labour*, he outlines the thesis that any belief which forms part of the *conscience collective* tends to assume a religious character, although in that work this is advanced only as a 'highly probable conjecture' which needs further study.[1] But Durkheim's recognition of the probable significance of religion in relation to the influence of the *conscience collective* in society is counterbalanced by an awareness of the fact that very profound changes have occurred with the emergence of the modern societal type. Durkheim consistently supports the conclusion, reached at an early point in his intellectual career, that both the 'defenders of the old economic theories are mistaken in thinking that regulation is not necessary today' and 'the apologists of the institution of religion are wrong in believing that yesterday's regulation can be useful today'.[2] The declining importance of religion in contemporary societies is a necessary consequence of the diminishing significance of mechanical solidarity:

> the importance we thus attribute to the sociology of religion does not in the least imply that religion must play the same role in present-day societies that it has played at other times. In a sense, the contrary conclusion would be more sound. Precisely because religion is a primordial phenomenon, it must yield more and more to the new social forms which it has engendered.[3]

It was not until 1895, Durkheim admits, that he became fully aware of the importance of religion as a social phenomenon. According to his own testimony, this realisation of the significance of religion, which appears to have been in large degree the outcome of his reading of the works of the English anthropologists, caused him to reappraise his earlier writings in order to draw out the implications of these new insights.[4] The conventional interpretation of this is that Durkheim moved from the relatively 'materialistic' position which he is presumed to have held in *The Division of Labour*, towards a standpoint much closer to 'idealism'. But this is misleading, if not wholly fallacious, and is a misinterpretation of Durkheim's views which stems in

[1] *DL*, p. 169.
[2] *DL*, p. 383.
[3] Preface to the *AS*, vol. 2, 1897–8, in Kurt H. Wolff: *Emile Durkheim et al., Essays on Sociology and Philosophy* (New York, 1964), pp. 352–3.
[4] Letter to the Editor of the *Revue néo-scolastique*, p. 613.

part from the frequent tendency of secondary writers to conflate Durkheim's functional and historical analysis in a way which is in fact foreign to Durkheim's thought.[5] Durkheim repeatedly stresses, almost as often as did Marx, the historical nature of man, and emphasises that the causal analysis of historical development is integral to sociology: 'history is not only the natural framework of human life; man is a product of history. If one separates men from history, if one tries to conceive of man outside time, fixed and immobile, one takes away his nature.'[6] The main underlying body of theory presented in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* is functional in character; that is, it concerns the functional role of religion in society. But *The Elementary Forms* also has to be read genetically, in relation to the series of profound changes which have rendered modern societies very different in form from prior types. In criticising Tönnies at the outset of his career, Durkheim emphasises that there is not an absolute break between mechanical and organic solidarity: the latter type presupposes moral regulation as much as the first, although this regulation cannot be of the traditional sort. The importance of Durkheim's novel understanding of religion, as developed in *The Elementary Forms*, is that it leads to a clarification of the nature of this continuity between the traditional forms of society and the modern. 'In order to understand these new forms, one must connect them with their religious origins, but without thereby confusing them with religious phenomena, properly speaking.'[7]

That this allows Durkheim, at the same time, to elucidate certain themes in his analysis of modern societies in a direct sense cannot, of course, be doubted. One main element in this is that, in Durkheim's later writings, the emphasis upon the constraining character of social phenomena cedes place to a greater stress upon the significance of the specific character of the symbols which mediate 'positive' attachment to ideals. But this is not a sudden capitulation to idealism. The heavy emphasis upon constraint and obligation in Durkheim's early writings is in considerable degree an outcome of the form of critical attack in which these play a part; and throughout the whole

[5] Parsons treats all Durkheim's writings as a monolithic attack on the 'problem of order'; whereas the main trend of Durkheim's work is about the analysis of the *changing forms* of social solidarity over the course of societal development. Parsons, esp. pp. 306, 309 & 315–16. Moreover, Durkheim stresses that his work is not an attempt to 'treat sociology *in genere*', but is primarily confined to 'a clearly delimited order of facts', which are 'moral or judicial rules'. 'La sociologie en France au XIX^{e} siècle', *Revue bleue*, vol. 13, 1900, part 2, p. 648.

[6] 'Introduction à la morale', *RP*, vol. 89, 1920, p. 89. For Durkheim's views on the relationship between history and sociology, see his review of three articles on the nature of history (two of which are by Croce and Sorel), *AS*, vol. 6, 1901–2, pp. 123–5. cf. also Robert Bellah: 'Durkheim and history', in Nisbet, *Emile Durkheim*, pp. 153–76. See also below, pp. 224–8.

[7] Preface to the *AS*, 1897–8, p. v. cf. the early study by Gehlke: Charles Elmer Gehlke: *Emile Durkheim's Contributions to Sociological Theory* (New York, 1915), pp. 48ff.

of his works Durkheim affirms that society is both the source and repository of human ideals.[8]

The character of the sacred

The Elementary Forms is based upon close scrutiny of what Durkheim calls 'the simplest and most primitive religion known today': Australian totemism.[9] In establishing a conceptualisation of religion, Durkheim follows Fustel de Coulanges' typification of the sacred and profane. It is fallacious, Durkheim states, to suppose that the existence of supernatural divinities is necessary to the existence of religion: there are systems of belief and practice which we should quite properly call 'religious', but where gods and spirits are either altogether absent, or are only of minor importance. What is a 'religious' belief cannot be defined with regard to the substantive content of ideas. The distinctive characteristic of religious beliefs is that 'they presuppose a classification of all things known to men, real and ideal, into two classes, two distinct kinds...'.[10] The character of religious thought is something which cannot be grasped except in terms of the notion of dichotomy *itself*: the world is separated into two entirely separate classes of objects and symbols, the 'sacred' and the 'profane': '*it is absolute*. In the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another.'[11]

The special character of the sacred is manifest in the fact that it is surrounded by ritual prescriptions and prohibitions which enforce this radical separation from the profane. A religion is never simply a set of beliefs: it always also involves prescribed ritual practices and a definite institutional form. There is no religion which does not have a church, although the form which this assumes varies widely. The concept of 'church', as Durkheim employs it, refers to the existence of a regularised ceremonial organisation pertaining to a definite group of worshippers; it does not imply that there is necessarily a specialised priesthood. Thus Durkheim reaches his famous definition of religion, as 'a unified (*solidaire*) system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things... beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them.'[12]

According to this definition, totemism is a form of religion, in spite of the fact that it has no personalised spirits or gods. It is certainly the most primitive type of religion which we know of today, and is probably the most primitive form which has ever existed.[13] Thus to isolate the factors underlying the origin of totemism is presumptively 'to discover at the same time the causes leading to the rise of the religious sentiment in humanity'.[14]

[8] cf. above, pp. 67–70.

[9] *EF*, p. 13; *FE*, p. 1.

[10] *EF*, p. 52; *FE*, p. 50.

[11] *EF*, p. 53; *FE*, p. 53.

[12] *EF*, p. 62; *FE*, p. 65.

[13] *EF*, p. 195.

[14] *EF*, p. 195. Durkheim rejects various theories which hold that totemism is itself derivative of a previous form of religion (pp. 195–214).

Totemism is integrally connected with the clan system of organisation which is characteristic of the Australian societies. A specific feature of the totemic clan is that the name which denotes the identity of the clan group is that of a material object – a totem – which is believed to have very special properties. No two clans within the same tribe have the same totem. Examination of the qualities which members of a clan believe to be possessed by their totem shows that the totem is the axis of the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. The totem ' is the very prototype of sacred things '.[15] The sacred character of the totem is manifest in the ritual observances which separate it from ordinary objects which may be used to utilitarian ends. Various ritual prescriptions and prohibitions also surround the totemic emblem – the representation of the totem which is put on objects, or adorns the person; these are often even more stringently enforced than those relating to the totemic object itself.

In addition, however, the members of the clan themselves possess sacred qualities. While in more advanced religions the believer is a profane being, this is not the case in totemism. Every man bears the name of his totem, which signifies that he shares in the religiosity of the totem itself, and there are believed to be genealogical connections between the individual and his totem. Totemism thus recognises three sorts of objects as sacred: the totem, the totemic emblem, and the members of the clan themselves. These three classes of sacred object in turn form part of a general cosmology: ' For the Australian, things themselves, all the things which populate the universe, are part of the tribe; they are constituent elements of it and, so to speak, permanent members of it; just like men, they have a determined place in the organisation of society.' [16] Thus, for example, the clouds belong to one totem, the sun to another: the whole of nature is brought into an ordered classification based upon the totemic clan organisation. All objects classed in a given clan or phratry (a combination of a group of clans) are regarded as sharing qualities in common, and such objects are believed by the members of the clan to be affiliated to themselves – men ' call them their friends and think that they are made out of the same flesh as themselves '.[17] This shows that the scope of religion extends much further than might initially appear. ' It not only comprises the totemic animals and the human members of the clan, but since nothing exists that is not classified in a clan and under a totem, there is similarly nothing which does not receive, in varying degree, a certain quality of religiosity.' [18]

Thus no one of the three sorts of sacred objects previously distinguished derives its sacred character from either of the others, since they all share a

[15] *EF*, p. 140; *FE*, p. 167.
[16] *EF*, p. 166; *FE*, p. 201.
[17] *EF*, p. 174. For a detailed description of such systems of classification, cf. Durkheim and Mauss: *Primitive Classification* (London, 1963).
[18] *EF*, p. 179; *FE*, p. 219.

common religiosity. Their sacred character must therefore emanate from a source which embraces them all, a force which they all partially share in, but which is nonetheless separate from them. In Australian totemism, this sacred energy is not clearly differentiated as such from the objects which embody it. Elsewhere, however, it is; among, for example, the North American Indians and in Melanesia, where it is called *mana*.[19] The religious energy found in a diffuse and all-pervasive form in Australian totemism is the original source of all later more particularised incarnations of this general force which become manifest as gods, spirits and demons in more complex religions.

Hence in order to explain the existence of religion we must discover the basis of the general energy which is the fount of all that is sacred. It is clearly not the immediate sensations produced by the totems as physical objects which explains why they should be attributed with divine force. The totemic objects are often insignificant animals or small plants, which could not intrinsically evoke the powerful feelings of religiosity which are attributed to them. Moreover, the *representation* of the totem is usually regarded as more sacred than the totemic object itself. This proves that ' the totem is above all a symbol, a material expression of something else '. The totem thus symbolises both the sacred energy and the identity of the clan group. ' So ', Durkheim asks rhetorically, ' if it is at once the symbol of the god and of the society, is that not because god and the society are one? ' The totemic principle is the clan group itself, ' hypostatised and represented to the imagination in the perceptible forms of the vegetable or the animal which serves as totem '.[20] Society commands both obligation and respect, the twin characteristics of the sacred. Whether it exists as a diffuse impersonal force or whether it is personalised, the sacred object is conceived as a superior entity, which in fact symbolises the superiority of society over the individual.

> In a general way, it cannot be doubted that a society has all that is necessary to awaken in human minds the sensation of the divine, simply by the influence which it exerts over them; for to its members it is what a god is to his believers. A god, in fact, is first and foremost a being whom men think of as superior to themselves in certain ways, and upon whom they believe that they depend. Whether it be a conscious personality, such as Zeus or Jahveh, or merely abstract forces such as those in play in totemism, the believer, in both cases, believes himself held to certain manners of acting which are imposed upon him by the nature of the sacred principle with which he feels he is in communion... Now the modes of conduct to which society is strongly enough attached to impose them upon its members, are, by that very fact, marked with a distinctive sign which evokes respect.[21]

The equation which Durkheim draws here between ' society ' and ' the sacred ' must not be misunderstood. Durkheim does *not* argue that ' religion

[19] The development of an abstract conception of *mana* as a universal force, according to Durkheim, comes about only when the totemic clan system breaks down. *Mana* is discussed at some length in Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss: ' Théorie générale de la magie ', *AS*, vol. 7, 1902–3, pp. 1–146.
[20] *EF*, p. 236; *FE*, p. 295.
[21] *EF*, pp. 236–8; *FE*, pp. 295–7.

creates society '; [22] it is just this misinterpretation which supports the notion that he adopts an 'idealist' position in *The Elementary Forms*. What he proposes is, by contrast, that religion is the expression of the *self-creation*, the autonomous development, of human society. This is not idealist theory, but conforms to the methodological principle according to which social facts must be explained in terms of other social facts.[23]

Durkheim attempts to show in a concrete way how religious symbolism is created and re-created in ceremonial. The Australian societies pass through alternate cycles, in one of which each kinship group lives separately, giving over the whole of its activities to economic ends, and in the other of which members of the clans or phratries assemble together for a definite period (which may be as short as a few days or may last several months). This latter phase is an occasion for public ceremonial, which usually has a highly intense and emotional character. In these ceremonials, according to Durkheim, men feel overpowered by a force greater than themselves, which results from the collective effervescence of the occasion. The individual is conveyed into a world which appears to him to be utterly different to that of the everyday utilitarian activity to which the bulk of his life is devoted. Here we see, therefore, the notion of the sacred *in statu nascendi*. Awareness of the divine is born out of this collective ferment, and so is the conception of its separateness from, and its superiority to, the everyday world of the profane.

Ceremonial and ritual

But why should this religious force take the specific form of a totem? This is because the totem is the emblem of the clan: the sentiments aroused by the presence of the collectivity fix themselves upon the totem as the most easily identifiable symbol of the group. This explains why the representation of the totem is more sacred than the totemic object itself. This still leaves the question unresolved, of course, as to why the clan should have taken a totem to begin with. Durkheim suggests that the totemic objects are simply those things with which men are continually in contact, and that each clan group has as its totem the animal or plant most frequently found in the place of its ceremonial meeting. Beginning with the totemic object, the religious sentiments come to be attached to those substances which nourish it, which resemble and differ from it, and thereby produce a general classification of nature relative to the totem. Moreover, since the religious force emanates from the collective assembly, at the same time as it 'appears to be outside of the individuals and to be endowed with a sort of transcendence over them', it 'can be realised only in and through them; in this sense, it is immanent in them and they necessarily represent it as such'.[24] Thence derives the third feature of totemism, that the individual members of the collectivity share in the religiosity of the totem.

This explanation shows why it is futile to attempt to define religion in terms of the substantive content of beliefs. Whether or not a given object or symbol becomes sacred does not depend upon its intrinsic properties. The most common-place object may become sacred if it is infused with the religious force. 'In this way a rag achieves sanctity and a scrap of paper may become extremely precious.' [25] This also shows why a sacred object may be subdivided without losing its holy quality. A piece of Jesus's cloak is as sacred as the whole thing.

It remains to account for the second fundamental aspect of religion – the ritual practices which are found in all religions. Two closely intertwined sorts of ritual exist. Sacred phenomena are by definition separate from the profane. One set of rites function to maintain this separation: these are negative rites or taboos, which are prohibitions limiting contact between the sacred and the profane. Such interdictions cover verbal as well as behavioural relationships with sacred things. In the normal way, nothing from the profane world must enter the sphere of the sacred in unchanged form. Thus special sacred garments are put on for ceremonial occasions, and all the normal temporal occupations are suspended.[26] Negative rites have one positive aspect: the individual who submits to them has sanctified himself and has thereby prepared himself for entry into the realm of the sacred. Positive rites proper are those which affect fuller communion with the religious, and which constitute the core of the religious ceremonial itself. The function of both sets of rites is easily specified, and is a necessary adjunct to the explanation of the derivation of religious beliefs outlined previously. Negative rites serve to maintain the essential separation between the sacred and the profane that the very existence of the sacred depends upon; these rites ensure that the two spheres do not encroach upon one another. The function of positive rites is to renew the commitment to religious ideals which otherwise would decline in the purely utilitarian world.

At this point the relationship between this analysis and that established in *The Division of Labour* may be briefly re-stated. Small-scale, traditional societies depend for their unity upon the existence of a strong *conscience collective*. What makes such a society a 'society' at all is the fact that its members adhere to common beliefs and sentiments. The ideals which are

[22] I have taken this phrase from H. Stuart Hughes: *Consciousness and Society* (New York, 1958), p. 285.

[23] *RSM*, p. 110.

[24] *EF*, p. 253. For a critical appraisal of Durkheim's analysis at this point, see P. M. Worsley: 'Emile Durkheim's theory of knowledge', *Sociological Review*, vol. 4, 1956, pp. 47–62.

[25] *Sociology and Philosophy*, p. 94.

[26] There are undoubtedly close connections between religious ritual and play. Durkheim mentions that games originate in religious ceremonial. On this matter, cf. Roger Caillois: *Man, Play and Games* (London, 1962). Religious ceremonials are, of course, for Durkheim in a literal sense 're-creation'.

expressed in religious beliefs are therefore the moral ideals upon which the unity of the society is founded. When individuals gather together in religious ceremonial they are hence re-affirming their faith in the moral order upon which mechanical solidarity depends. The positive rites entailed in religious ceremonial thus provide for the regular moral reconsolidation of the group, necessary because in the activities of day to day life in the profane world individuals pursue their own egoistic interests, and are consequently liable to become detached from the moral values upon which societal solidarity depends.

> The only way of renewing the collective representations which relate to sacred things is to retemper them in the very source of religious life, that is to say, in assembled groups... Men are more confident because they feel themselves stronger; and they really are stronger, because forces which were languishing are now re-awakened in the consciousness.[27]

There exists yet another type of rite: the 'piacular' (expiatory) rite, the most important instance of which is that embodied in ceremonies of mourning. Just as religious sentiments of joy become raised to fever-point in the collective excitation produced by the ceremonial, so a 'panic of sorrow' is developed in mourning rituals.[28] The effect of this is to draw together the members of the group whose solidarity has been threatened by the loss of one of its members. 'Since they weep together, they hold to one another and the group is not weakened, in spite of the blow which has fallen upon it... the group feels its strength gradually returning to it; it begins to hope and to live again.'[29] This helps to explain the existence of malevolent religious spirits. There are everywhere two sorts of religious powers: benevolent influences on the one hand, and evil forces which bring sickness, death and destruction on the other. The collective activity involved in piacular rites provides a parallel situation to that which gives rise to the conception of beneficent forces, save that grief is the dominant emotion. 'This is the experience which a man interprets when he imagines that outside him there are evil beings whose hostility, whether constitutional or transitory, can only be placated by human suffering.'[30]

The categories of knowledge

In totemism the divine principle is much more all-pervasive than in more complex societal forms: we discover in the Australian societies religious ideas such as must have everywhere formed the original source of all subsequently differentiated systems of ideas. The totemic classification of nature provides the initial source of the logical categories or classes within which knowledge is ordered. The classification of objects and properties in nature

[27] *EF*, p. 387. The 'rhythm' of collective life is analysed in detail in Mauss's 'Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés eskimos', *AS*, vol. 9, 1904–5, pp 39–130.
[28] *EF*, p. 446.
[29] *EF*, pp. 447–8.
[30] *EF*, p. 459; p. 590.

is built upon the separation of society into totemic clan divisions. 'The unity of these first logical systems merely reproduces the unity of the society.'[31] This does not imply that society wholly structures the perception of nature. Durkheim does not declare that there are no biologically given perceptual discriminations, but points out, on the contrary, that the most rudimentary classification presupposes some recognition of sensory similarities and differences. The import of Durkheim's argument is that these native discriminations do not form the axis of the classificatory system, but constitute only a secondary principle of ordering:[32] 'The feeling of resemblances is one thing and the idea of class (*genre*) is another. The class is the external framework of which objects perceived to be similar form, in part, the contents.'

The existence of logical classes involves the formation of clear-cut dichotomies. However, nature itself manifests continuity in space and time, and the sensory information which we register from the world is not ordered in this discontinuous fashion, but is made up of 'indistinct and shifting images'.[33] Thus the notion of logical class itself, and the hierarchical distribution of relationships between categories, derive from the division of society into clans and phratries. But the mode in which objects are put into one category rather than another is directly influenced by sensory discriminations. For example, if the sun is in one category, the moon and stars will usually be placed in an opposed category; if the white cockatoo is in one category, the black cockatoo is put in the other.

Just as the axiomatic categories in terms of which abstract thought is ordered are derived from society, so too are the basic dimensions of force, space and time. The elemental religious force is the original model from which the concept of force was derived, and later incorporated into philosophy and natural science.[34] The same is true of the other of the Aristotelean categories: the notion of time finds its original prototype in the periodic character of social life, and space from the physical territory occupied by society. Time and space are not, as Kant held, inherent categories of the human mind. No doubt every individual is conscious of living in a present which is distinct from the past. But the *concept* of 'time' is not personalised; it involves an abstract category shared by all members of the group. 'It is not *my time* that is thus arranged; it is time in general...'[35] This must have originated from the experience of the collectivity: the temporal divisions of years, weeks and days stem from the periodic distribution of public ceremonials, rites and holy-

[31] *EF*, p. 170.
[32] This does introduce, however, difficulties of circularity in Durkheim's theory. cf. Parsons, p. 447.
[33] *EF*, pp. 171–2; *FE*, pp. 208–9.
[34] Durkheim notes that this has already been indicated by Comte. But Comte mistakenly inferred that the concept of force will eventually be eliminated from science, 'for owing to its mystic origins, he refused it all objective value'. *EF*, p. 234.
[35] *EF*, p. 23.