The Elementary Forms of RELIGIOUS LIFE

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CONCLUSION

I said at the beginning of this book that the religion whose study I was undertaking contained within itself the most characteristic elements of religious life. The truth of that proposition can now be tested. However simple the system I have studied may be, I have nonetheless found within it all the great ideas and all the principal forms of ritual conduct on which even the most advanced religions are based: the distinction between sacred and profane things; the ideas of soul, spirit, mythical personality, national and even international divinity; a negative cult with the ascetic practices that are its extreme form; rites of sacrifice and communion; mimetic, commemorative, and piacular rites. Nothing essential is absent. Thus I have reason to be confident that the results achieved are not specific to totemism but can help us understand what religion in general is.

Some will object that a single religion, whatever its geographic spread, is a narrow basis for such an induction. It is by no means my intent to ignore what an expanded test can add to the persuasiveness of a theory. But it is no less true that when a law has been proved by a single well-made experiment, this proof is universally valid. If a scientist managed to intercept the secret of life in only a single case, the truths thus obtained would be applicable to all living things, including the most advanced, even if this case was the simplest protoplasmic being imaginable. Accordingly if, in the very humble societies just studied, I have managed to capture some of the elements that comprise the most fundamental religious ideas, there is no reason not to extend the most general results of this research to other religions. In fact, it is inconceivable that the same effect could be sometimes due now to one cause, now to another, according to the circumstances, unless fundamentally the two causes were but one. A single idea cannot express one reality here and a different one there unless this duality is merely apparent. If, among certain peoples, the ideas "sacred," "soul," and "gods" can be explained sociologically, then scientifically we must presume that the same explanation is valid in principle for all the peoples among whom the same ideas are found with essentially the same characteristics. Assuming that I am not mistaken, then, at least some of my conclusions can legitimately be generalized. The time has come to draw these out. And an induction of this sort, based on a well-defined experiment, is less reckless than so many cursory generalizations that, in their striving to reach the essence of religion in a single stroke without

grounding themselves in the analysis of any particular religion, are at great risk of floating away into the void.

I

Most often, the theorists who have set out to express religion in rational terms have regarded it as being, first and foremost, a system of ideas that correspond to a definite object. That object has been conceived in different ways—nature, the infinite, the unknowable, the ideal, and so forth—but these differences are of little importance. In every case, the representations—that is, the beliefs—were considered the essential element of religion. For their part, rites appeared from this standpoint to be no more than an external, contingent, and physical translation of those inward states that alone were deemed to have intrinsic value. This notion is so widespread that most of the time debates on the topic of religion turn around and about on the question of whether religion can or cannot be reconciled with science—that is, whether there is room alongside scientific knowledge for another form of thought held to be specifically religious.

But the believers—the men who, living a religious life, have a direct sense of what constitutes religion—object that, in terms of their day-to-day experience, this way of seeing does not ring true. Indeed, they sense that the true function of religion is not to make us think, enrich our knowledge, or add representations of a different sort and source to those we owe to science. Its true function is to make us act and to help us live. The believer who has communed with his god is not simply a man who sees new truths that the unbeliever knows not; he is a man who *is stronger.** Within himself, he feels more strength to endure the trials of existence or to overcome them. He is as though lifted above the human miseries, because he is lifted above his human condition. He believes he is delivered from evil—whatever the form in which he conceives of evil. The first article of any faith is belief in salvation by faith.

But it is hard to see how a mere idea could have that power. In fact, an idea is but one element of ourselves. How could it confer on us powers that are superior to those given us in our natural makeup? As rich in emotive power as an idea may be, it cannot add anything to our natural vitality; it can only release emotive forces that are already within us, neither creating nor increasing them. From the fact that we imagine an object as worthy of being loved and sought after, it does not follow that we should feel stronger. Energies greater than those at our disposal must come from the object, and, more

* *Qui peut davantage.* Literally "who *is capable of* more." Durkheim italicized *peut.*

than that, we must have some means of making them enter into us and blend into our inner life. To achieve this, it is not enough that we think about them; it is indispensable that we place ourselves under their influence, that we turn ourselves in the direction from which we can best feel that influence. In short, we must act; and so we must repeat the necessary acts as often as is necessary to renew their effects. From this standpoint, it becomes apparent that the set of regularly repeated actions that make up the cult regains all its importance. In fact, anyone who has truly practiced a religion knows very well that it is the cult that stimulates the feelings of joy, inner peace, serenity, and enthusiasm that, for the faithful, stand as experimental proof of their beliefs. The cult is not merely a system of signs by which the faith is outwardly expressed; it is the sum total of means by which that faith is created and recreated periodically. Whether the cult consists of physical operations or mental ones, it is always the cult that is efficacious.

This entire study rests on the postulate that the unanimous feeling of believers down the ages cannot be mere illusion. Therefore, like a recent apologist of faith,[1] I accept that religious belief rests on a definite experience, whose demonstrative value is, in a sense, not inferior to that of scientific experiments, though it is different. I too think "that a tree is known by its fruits,"[2] and that its fertility is the best proof of what its roots are worth. But merely because there exists a "religious experience," if you will, that is grounded in some manner (is there, by the way, any experience that is not?), it by no means follows that the reality which grounds it should conform objectively with the idea the believers have of it. The very fact that the way in which this reality has been conceived has varied infinitely in different times is enough to prove that none of these conceptions expresses it adequately. If the scientist sets it down as axiomatic that the sensations of heat and light that men have correspond to some objective cause, he does not thereby conclude that this cause is the same as it appears to the senses. Likewise, even if the feelings the faithful have are not imaginary, they still do not constitute privileged intuitions; there is no reason whatever to think that they inform us better about the nature of their object than ordinary sensations do about the nature of bodies and their properties. To discover what that object consists of, then, we must apply to those sensations an analysis similar to the one that has replaced the senses' representation of the world with a scientific and conceptual one.

This is precisely what I have tried to do. We have seen that this reality—

[1]William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* [London, Longmans, 1902].

[2]Ibid. (p. 19 of the French translation).

which mythologies have represented in so many different forms, but which is the objective, universal, and eternal cause of those *sui generis* sensations of which religious experience is made—is society. I have shown what moral forces it develops and how it awakens that feeling of support, safety, and protective guidance which binds the man of faith to his cult. It is this reality that makes him rise above himself. Indeed, this is the reality that makes him, for what makes man is that set of intellectual goods which is civilization, and civilization is the work of society. In this way is explained the preeminent role of the cult in all religions, whatever they are. This is so because society cannot make its influence felt unless it is in action, and it is in action only if the individuals who comprise it are assembled and acting in common. It is through common action that society becomes conscious of and affirms itself; society is above all an active cooperation. As I have shown, even collective ideas and feelings are possible only through the overt movements that symbolize them.[3] Thus it is action that dominates religious life, for the very reason that society is its source.

To all the reasons adduced to justify this conception, a final one can be added that emerges from this book as a whole. Along the way, I have established that the fundamental categories of thought, and thus science itself, have religious origins. The same has been shown to be true of magic, and thus of the various techniques derived from magic. Besides, it has long been known that, until a relatively advanced moment in evolution, the rules of morality and law were not distinct from ritual prescriptions. In short, then, we can say that nearly all the great social institutions were born in religion.[4] For the principal features of collective life to have begun as none other than various features of religious life, it is evident that religious life must necessarily have been the eminent form and, as it were, the epitome of collective life. If religion gave birth to all that is essential in society, that is so because the idea of society is the soul of religion.

Thus religious forces are human forces, moral forces. Probably because collective feelings become conscious of themselves only by settling upon external objects, those very forces could not organize themselves without taking some of their traits from things. In this way, they took on a kind of

[3]See above, pp. 231ff.

[4]Only one form of social activity has not as yet been explicitly linked to religion: economic activity. Nevertheless, the techniques that derive from magic turn out, by this very fact, to have indirectly religious origins. Furthermore, economic value is a sort of power or efficacy, and we know the religious origins of the idea of power. Since mana can be conferred by wealth, wealth itself has some. From this we see that the idea of economic value and that of religious value cannot be unrelated; but the nature of these relationships has not yet been studied.

physical nature; they came to mingle as such with the life of the physical world, and through them it was thought possible to explain events in that world. But when they are considered only from this standpoint and in this role, we see only what is most superficial about them. In reality, the essential elements out of which they are made are borrowed from consciousness. Ordinarily, they do not seem to have a human character except when they are thought of in human form,[5] but even the most impersonal and most anonymous are nothing other than objectified feelings.

Only by seeing religions in this way does it become possible to detect their real meaning. If we rely on appearances, the rites often seem to be purely manual operations—anointings, purifications, meals. To consecrate a thing, one places it in contact with a source of religious energy, just as today a body is placed in contact with a source of heat or electricity in order to heat or electrify it. The procedures used in the two cases are not essentially different. Understood in this way, religious technique seems to be a kind of mystical mechanics. But these physical operations are but the outer envelope in which mental operations lie hidden. In the end, the point is not to exert a kind of physical constraint upon blind and, more than that, imaginary forces but to reach, fortify, and discipline consciousnesses. The lower religions have sometimes been called materialistic. That term is incorrect. All religions, even the crudest, are in a sense spiritualistic. The powers they bring into play are, above all, spiritual, and their primary function is to act upon moral life. In this way, we understand that what was done in the name of religion cannot have been done in vain, for it is necessarily the society of men, it is humanity, that has reaped the fruits.

It may be asked, Exactly what society is it that in this way becomes the substrate of religious life? Is it the real society, such as it exists and functions before our eyes, with the moral and juridical organization that it has toiled to fashion for itself over the course of history? But that society is full of flaws and imperfections. In that society, good rubs shoulders with evil, injustice is ever on the throne, and truth is continually darkened by error. How could a being so crudely made inspire the feelings of love, ardent enthusiasm, and willing self-sacrifice that all the religions demand of their faithful? Those perfect beings that are the gods cannot have taken their traits from such a mediocre, sometimes even base, reality.

Would it not be instead the perfect society, in which justice and truth reigned, and from which evil in all its forms was uprooted? No one disputes

[5]It is for this reason that Frazer and even Preuss set the impersonal religious forces outside religion, or at most at its threshold, in order to relate them to magic.

that this perfect society has a close relationship to religious sentiment, for religions are said to aim at realizing it. However, this society is not an empirical fact, well defined and observable; it is a fancy, a dream with which men have lulled their miseries but have never experienced in reality. It is a mere idea that expresses in consciousness our more or less obscure aspirations toward the good, the beautiful, and the ideal. These aspirations have their roots in us; since they come from the very depths of our being, nothing outside us can account for them. Furthermore, in and of themselves, they are already religious; hence, far from being able to explain religion, the ideal society presupposes it.[6]

But to see only the idealistic side of religion is to simplify arbitrarily. In its own way, religion is realistic. There is no physical or moral ugliness, no vice, and no evil that has not been deified. There have been gods of theft and trickery, lust and war, sickness and death. As uplifted as its idea of divinity is, Christianity itself was obliged to make a place in its mythology for the spirit of evil. Satan is an essential component of the Christian machinery; yet, even if he is an impure being, he is not a profane being. The anti-god is a god—lower and subordinate, it is true, yet invested with broad powers; he is even the object of rites, at the very least negative ones. Far from ignoring and disregarding the real society, religion is its image, reflecting all its features, even the most vulgar and repellent. Everything is to be found in it, and if we most often see good triumphing over evil, life over death, and the forces of light over the forces of darkness, this is because it is no different in reality. If the relationship between these forces was reversed, life would be impossible, whereas in fact, life maintains itself and even tends to develop.

But it is quite true that even if the mythologies and theologies allow a clear glimpse of the reality, the reality we find in them has been enlarged, transformed, and idealized. The most primitive religions are no different in this respect from the most modern and the most refined. We have seen, for example, how the Arunta place at the beginning of time a mythical society whose organization exactly replicates the one that still exists today. It is made up of the same clans and phratries, it is subject to the same marriage rules, and it practices the same rites. But the personages that comprise it are ideal beings endowed with capacities to which mere mortals cannot lay claim. Belonging to animality and humanity at the same time, their nature is not only higher but also different. The evil powers undergo a similar metamorphosis

[6][Emile] Boutroux, *Science et religion [dans la philosophie contemporaine,* Paris, E. Flammarion, 1907], pp. 206–207.

in that religion. It is as though evil itself undergoes refinement and idealization. The question that arises is where this idealization comes from.

One proposed answer is that man has a natural capacity to idealize, that is, to replace the real world with a different one to which he travels in thought. But such an answer changes the terms of the problem, neither solving nor even advancing it. This persistent idealization is a fundamental feature of religions. So to explain religions in terms of an innate capacity to idealize is simply to replace one word with its equivalent; it is like saying that man created religion because he has a religious nature. Yet the animal knows only one world: the world it perceives through experience, internal as well as external. Man alone has the capacity to conceive of the ideal and add it to the real. Where, then, does this remarkable distinction come from? Before taking it to be a primary fact or a mysterious virtue that eludes science, one should first have made sure that this remarkable distinction does not arise from conditions that can be determined empirically.

My proposed explanation of religion has the specific advantage of providing an answer to this question, since what defines the sacred is that the sacred is added to the real. And since the ideal is defined in the same way, we cannot explain the one without explaining the other. We have seen, in fact, that if collective life awakens religious thought when it rises to a certain intensity, that is so because it brings about a state of effervescence that alters the conditions of psychic activity. The vital energies become hyperexcited, the passions more intense, the sensations more powerful; there are indeed some that are produced only at this moment. Man does not recognize himself; he feels somehow transformed and in consequence transforms his surroundings. To account for the very particular impressions he receives, he imputes to the things with which he is most directly in contact properties that they do not have, exceptional powers and virtues that the objects of ordinary experience do not possess. In short, upon the real world where profane life is lived, he superimposes another that, in a sense, exists only in his thought, but one to which he ascribes a higher kind of dignity than he ascribes to the real world of profane life. In two respects, then, this other world is an ideal one.

Thus the formation of an ideal is by no means an irreducible datum that eludes science. It rests on conditions that can be uncovered through observation. It is a natural product of social life. If society is to be able to become conscious of itself and keep the sense it has of itself at the required intensity, it must assemble and concentrate. This concentration brings about an uplifting of moral life that is expressed by a set of ideal conceptions in which the new life thus awakened is depicted. These ideal conceptions correspond to

the onrush of psychic forces added at that moment to those we have at our disposal for the everyday tasks of life. A society can neither create nor recreate itself without creating some kind of ideal by the same stroke. This creation is not a sort of optional extra step by which society, being already made, merely adds finishing touches; it is the act by which society makes itself, and remakes itself, periodically. Thus, when we set the ideal society in opposition to the real society, like two antagonists supposedly leading us in opposite directions, we are reifying and opposing abstractions. The ideal society is not outside the real one but is part of it. Far from our being divided between them as though between two poles that repel one another, we cannot hold to the one without holding to the other. A society is not constituted simply by the mass of individuals who comprise it, the ground they occupy, the things they use, or the movements they make, but above all by the idea it has of itself. And there is no doubt that society sometimes hesitates over the manner in which it must conceive itself. It feels pulled in all directions. When such conflicts break out, they are not between the ideal and the reality but between different ideals, between the ideal of yesterday and that of today, between the ideal that has the authority of tradition and one that is only coming into being. Studying how ideals come to evolve certainly has its place, but no matter how this problem is solved, the fact remains that the whole of it unfolds in the world of the ideal.

Therefore the collective ideal that religion expresses is far from being due to some vague capacity innate to the individual; rather, it is in the school of collective life that the individual has learned to form ideals. It is by assimilating the ideals worked out by society that the individual is able to conceive of the ideal. It is society that, by drawing him into its sphere of action, has given him the need to raise himself above the world of experience, while at the same time furnishing him the means of imagining another. It is society that built this new world while building itself, because it is society that the new world expresses. There is nothing mysterious about the faculty of idealization, then, whether in the individual or in the group. This faculty is not a sort of luxury, which man could do without, but a condition of his existence. If he had not acquired it, he would not be a social being, which is to say that he would not be man. To be sure, collective ideals tend to become individualized as they become incarnate in individuals. Each person understands them in his own way and gives them an individual imprint, some elements being taken out and others being added. As the individual personality develops and becomes an autonomous source of action, the personal ideal diverges from the social one. But if we want to understand that aptitude for living outside the real, which is seemingly so remarkable, all we need to do is relate it to the social conditions on which it rests.

But the last thing to do is to see this theory of religion as merely a refurbishment of historical materialism. That would be a total misunderstanding of my thought. In pointing out an essentially social thing in religion, I in no way mean to say that religion simply translates the material forms and immediate vital necessities of society into another language. I do indeed take it to be obvious that social life depends on and bears the mark of its material base, just as the mental life of the individual depends on the brain and indeed on the whole body. But collective consciousness is something other than a mere epiphenomenon of its morphological base, just as individual consciousness is something other than a mere product of the nervous system. If collective consciousness is to appear, a *sui generis* synthesis of individual consciousnesses must occur. The product of this synthesis is a whole world of feelings, ideas, and images that follow their own laws once they are born. They mutually attract one another, repel one another, fuse together, subdivide, and proliferate; and none of these combinations is directly commanded and necessitated by the state of the underlying reality. Indeed, the life thus unleashed enjoys such great independence that it sometimes plays about in forms that have no aim or utility of any kind, but only for the pleasure of affirming itself. I have shown that precisely this is often true of ritual activity and mythological thought.[7]

But if religion has social causes, how can the individual cult and the universalistic character of certain religions be explained? If it is born *in foro externo,** how was it able to pass into the inner core of the individual and become ever more deeply implanted in him? If it is the work of definite and particular societies, how could it become detached enough from them to be conceived of as the common holding of all humanity?

Since, in the course of our study, we came upon the first seeds of individual religion and religious cosmopolitanism and saw how they were formed, we possess the most general elements of an answer to that twofold question.

I have shown that the religious force animating the clan becomes individualized by incarnating itself in individual consciousnesses. Secondary sacred beings are formed in this way, each individual having his own that is made in his own image, part of his intimate life, and at one with his fate. They are the soul, the individual totem, the protecting ancestor, and so forth.

*In the external world.

[7]See above, pp. 382ff. Cf. my article on the same question: "Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives," *RMM*, vol. VI, 1898 [pp. 273ff.].

These beings are the objects of rites that the worshipper can conduct on his own, apart from any group, so it is actually a primitive form of the individual cult. Of course, it is still only a very undeveloped cult, but that is because the cult expressing the individual personality could not be very well developed, given that the individual personality is at that stage still marked very slightly, with little value attributed to it. As individuals became more differentiated and the value of the person grew, the corresponding cult itself took on a larger role in religious life as a whole, at the same time more completely sealing itself off from the outside.

The existence of individual cults does not therefore imply anything that contradicts or complicates a sociological explanation of religion. The religious forces they address are merely collective forces in individualized forms. Even where religion seems to be entirely within the individual, the living source that feeds it is to be found in society. We can now judge the worth of the radical individualism that is intent on making religion out to be a purely individual thing: It misconceives the fundamental conditions of religious life. And if that radical individualism has remained in the state of unrealized theoretical aspiration up to now, that is because it is unrealizable in fact. A philosophy can very well be worked out in the silence of inward meditation, but not a faith. A faith above all is warmth, life, enthusiasm, enhancement of all mental activity, uplift of the individual above himself. Except by reaching outside himself, how could the individual add to the energies he possesses? How could he transcend himself by his own strength? The only hearth at which we can warm ourselves morally is the hearth made by the company of our fellow men; the only moral forces with which we can nourish our own and increase them are those we get from others. Let us even grant the existence of beings more or less like those the mythologies depict for us. If they are to have the useful influence over souls that is their *raison d'être*, we must believe in them. The beliefs are at work only when they are shared. We may well keep them them going for a time through personal effort alone, but they are neither born nor obtained in this way, and it is doubtful that they can be preserved under those conditions. In fact, the man who has a genuine faith feels an irrepressible need to spread it. To do so, he comes out of his isolation, he approaches others, he seeks to convince them, and it is the ardor of the convictions he brings about that in turn reinforces his own. That ardor would speedily dissipate if left alone.

What is true of religious individualism is true of religious universalism. Far from being exclusively the trait of a few very great religions, we have found it in the Australian system—not at its base, to be sure, but at its pinnacle. Bunjil, Daramulun, and Baiame are not mere tribal gods, since each is

recognized by a number of different tribes. Their cult is in a sense international. So this conception is quite close to the one found in the most modern theologies. As a result, and for that very reason, certain writers have felt duty bound to deny its authenticity, even though its authenticity cannot be denied.

But I have been able to show how this conception was formed.

Tribes that neighbor one another and are of the same civilization cannot help but have ongoing relationships with one another. All kinds of circumstances provide the occasion for contact. Apart from business, which is still rudimentary, there are marriages; international marriages are very common in Australia. In the course of these contacts, men naturally become conscious of the moral kinship that unites them. They have the same social organization, the same division into phratries, clans, and marriage classes; they conduct the same or similar initiation rites. The effect of mutual borrowings or agreements is to consolidate the spontaneous similarities. The gods to which such obviously identical institutions were attached could hardly remain distinct in people's minds. Everything brought them together; and in consequence, even supposing that each tribe had worked out its own notion of them independently they must as a matter of course have had a tendency to amalgamate. Furthermore, the likelihood is that the gods were first conceived in these intertribal assemblies, for they are gods of initiation, first and foremost, and various tribes are usually represented at the initiation ceremonies. Thus if sacred beings unconnected with any territorially defined society were formed, it is not because they had an extrasocial origin. Rather, it is because above these territorial groupings are others with more fluid boundaries. These other groupings do not have fixed frontiers but include a great many more or less neighboring and related tribes. The very special social life that emerges tends to spread over an area without clear limits. Quite naturally, the corresponding mythological personages are of the same character; their sphere of influence is not definite; they hover above the individual tribes and above the land. These are the great international gods.

Nothing in this situation is peculiar to Australian societies. There is no people, and no State, that is not engaged with another more or less undelimited society that includes all peoples and all States* with which it is directly or indirectly in contact; there is no national life that is not under the sway of an international collective life. The more we advance in history, the larger and the more important these international groupings become. In this way, we see how, in some cases, the universalistic tendency could develop to

*Durkheim capitalized "Church" and "State."

the point of affecting not only the highest ideas of the religious system but also the very principles on which it rests.

II

Thus there is something eternal in religion that is destined to outlive the succession of particular symbols in which religious thought has clothed itself. There can be no society that does not experience the need at regular intervals to maintain and strengthen the collective feelings and ideas that provide its coherence and its distinct individuality. This moral remaking can be achieved only through meetings, assemblies, and congregations in which the individuals, pressing close to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments. Such is the origin of ceremonies that, by their object, by their results, and by the techniques used, are not different in kind from ceremonies that are specifically religious. What basic difference is there between Christians' celebrating the principal dates of Christ's life, Jews' celebrating the exodus from Egypt or the promulgation of the Decalogue, and a citizens' meeting commemorating the advent of a new moral charter or some other great event of national life?

If today we have some difficulty imagining what the feasts and ceremonies of the future will be, it is because we are going through a period of transition and moral mediocrity. The great things of the past that excited our fathers no longer arouse the same zeal among us, either because they have passed so completely into common custom that we lose awareness of them or because they no longer suit our aspirations. Meanwhile, no replacement for them has yet been created. We are no longer electrified by those principles in whose name Christianity exhorted the masters to treat their slaves humanely; and besides, Christianity's idea of human equality and fraternity seems to us today to leave too much room for unjust inequalities. Its pity for the downcast seems to us too platonic. We would like one that is more vigorous but do not yet see clearly what it should be or how it might be realized in fact.

In short, the former gods are growing old or dying, and others have not been born. This is what voided Comte's attempt to organize a religion using old historical memories, artificially revived. It is life itself, and not a dead past, that can produce a living cult. But that state of uncertainty and confused anxiety cannot last forever. A day will come when our societies once again will know hours of creative effervescence during which new ideals will again spring forth and new formulas emerge to guide humanity for a time. And

when those hours have been lived through, men will spontaneously feel the need to relive them in thought from time to time—that is, to preserve their memory by means of celebrations that regularly recreate their fruits. We have already seen how the [French] Revolution instituted a whole cycle of celebrations in order to keep the principles that inspired it eternally young. If that institution quickly perished, it is because the revolutionary faith lasted only briefly, and because disappointments and discouragements quickly replaced the first moment of enthusiasm. But although that work miscarried, it helps us to imagine what might have come to be under other conditions; and everything leads us to believe that the work will sooner or later be taken up again. There are no immortal gospels, and there is no reason to believe that humanity is incapable of conceiving new ones in the future. As to knowing what the symbols will be in which the new faith will come to express itself, whether they will resemble those of the past, whether they will better suit the reality to be expressed—that is a question that exceeds human faculties of prediction and that, moreover, is beside the point.

But feasts and rites—in a word, the cult—are not the whole of religion. Religion is not only a system of practices but also a system of ideas whose object is to express the world; even the humblest have their own cosmologies, as we have seen. No matter how these two elements of religious life may be related, they are nonetheless quite different. One is turned toward action, which it elicits and regulates; the other toward thought, which it enriches and organizes. Since they do not rest on the same conditions, then, there is reason to ask whether the ideas correspond to needs as universal and as permanent as the practices do.

When we impute specific traits to religious thought and believe its function is to express, by its own methods, a whole aspect of the real that eludes both ordinary knowledge and science, we naturally refuse to grant that the speculative role of religion could ever be overthrown. But it does not seem to me that analysis of the facts has demonstrated this specificity of religion. The religion we have just studied is one of those in which the symbols used are the most unsettling to reason. Everything about it seems full of mystery. At first glance, those beings that simultaneously participate in the most disparate kingdoms, multiply without ceasing to be one, and break up without diminishing, seem to belong to an entirely different world from the one in which we live. Some have even gone so far as to say that the thought that built it was totally ignorant of the laws of logic. Never, perhaps, has the contrast between reason and faith been so pronounced. If ever there was a moment in history when the difference between them must have stood out plainly, then that truly was the moment.

But I have noted, contrary to such appearances, that the realities to which religious speculation was applied then are the same ones that would later serve as objects of scientists' reflection. Those realities are nature, man, and society. The mystery that appears to surround them is entirely superficial and fades upon closer scrutiny. To have them appear as they are, it is enough to pull aside the veil with which the mythological imagination covered them. Religion strives to translate those realities into an intelligible language that does not differ in nature from that used by science. Both attempt to connect things to one another, establish internal relations between those things, classify them, and systematize them. We have even seen that the essential notions of scientific logic are of religious origin. Of course, science reworks those notions in order to use them. It distills out all sorts of extraneous elements and generally brings to all its efforts a critical spirit that is unknown in religion; it surrounds itself with precautions to "avoid haste and bias" and to keep passions, prejudices, and all subjective influences at bay. But these improvements in method are not enough to differentiate science from religion. In this regard, both pursue the same goal; scientific thought is only a more perfected form of religious thought. Hence it seems natural that religion should lose ground as science becomes better at performing its task.

There is no doubt, in fact, that this regression has taken place over the course of history. Although the offspring of religion, science tends to replace religion in everything that involves the cognitive and intellectual functions. Christianity has by now definitively sanctioned that replacement, in the realm of physical phenomena. Regarding matter as a profane thing par excellence, Christianity has easily abandoned knowledge to a discipline that is alien to it, *tradidit mundum hominum disputationi.** So it is that the sciences of nature have, with relative ease, succeeded in establishing their authority and in having that authority acknowledged. But Christianity could not let the world of souls out of its grip as easily, for it is above all over souls that the god of the Christians wishes to rule. This is why the idea of subjecting psychic life to science long amounted to a kind of profanation; even today, that idea is still repugnant to many. Today, experimental and comparative psychology has been created and must be reckoned with. But the world of religious and moral life still remains forbidden. The great majority of men continue to believe that there is an order of things that the intellect can enter only by very special routes. Hence the strong resistance one encounters whenever one attempts to treat religious and moral phenomena scientifically. Yet these efforts

*It abandoned the world to the disputes of men.

persist despite opposition, and that very persistence makes it foreseeable that this last barrier will give way in the end, and that science will establish itself as mistress, even in this preserve.

This is what the conflict of science and religion is about. People often have a mistaken idea of it.* Science is said to deny religion in principle. But religion exists; it is a system of given facts; in short, it is a reality. How could science deny a reality? Furthermore, insofar as religion is action and insofar as it is a means of making men live, science cannot possibly take its place. Although science expresses life, it does not create life, and science can very well seek to explain faith but by that very fact presupposes faith. Hence there is conflict on only a limited point. Of the two functions originally performed by religion, there is one, only one, that tends more and more to escape it, and that is the speculative function. What science disputes in religion is not its right to exist but its right to dogmatize about the nature of things, its pretensions to special expertise for explaining man and the world. In fact, religion does not know itself. It knows neither what it is made of nor what needs it responds to. Far from being able to tell science what to do, religion is itself an object for science! And on the other hand, since apart from a reality that eludes scientific reflection, religious speculation has no special object of its own, that religion obviously cannot play the same role in the future as it did in the past.

However, religion seems destined to transform itself rather than disappear.

I have said that there is something eternal in religion: the cult and the faith. But men can neither conduct ceremonies for which they can see no rationale, nor accept a faith that they in no way understand. To spread or simply maintain religion, one must justify it, which is to say one must devise a theory of it. A theory of this sort must assuredly rest on the various sciences, as soon as they come into existence: social sciences first, since religious faith has its origins in society; psychology next, since society is a synthesis of human consciousnesses; sciences of nature finally, since man and society are linked to the universe and can be abstracted from it only artificially. But as important as these borrowings from the established sciences may be, they are in no way sufficient; faith is above all a spur to action, whereas science, no matter how advanced, always remains at a distance from action. Science is fragmentary and incomplete; it advances but slowly and is never finished; but life—that cannot wait. Theories whose calling is to make people live and make them act, must therefore rush ahead of science and complete it prema-

*This sentence is missing from Swain.

turely. They are possible only if the demands of practicality and vital necessities, such as we feel without distinctly conceiving them, push thought beyond what science permits us to affirm. In this way, even the most rational and secularized religions cannot and can never do without a particular kind of speculation which, although having the same objects as science itself, still cannot be properly scientific. The obscure intuitions of sense and sensibility often take the place of logical reasons.

Thus, from one point of view, this speculation resembles the speculation we encounter in the religions of the past, while from another, it differs from them. While exercising the right to go beyond science, it must begin by knowing and drawing inspiration from science. As soon as the authority of science is established, science must be reckoned with; under pressure of need, one can go beyond science, but it is from science that one must start out. One can affirm nothing that science denies, deny nothing that science affirms, and establish nothing that does not directly or indirectly rest on principles taken from science. From then on, faith* no longer holds the same sway as in the past over the system of representations that can continue to be called religious. There rises a power before religion that, even though religion's offspring, from then on applies its own critique and its own testing to religion. And everything points to the prospect that this testing will become ever more extensive and effective, without any possibility of assigning a limit to its future influence.

III

If the fundamental notions of science are of religious origin, how could religion have engendered them? It is not obvious at first glance what the points of contact between logic and religion might be. Indeed, since the reality that religious thought expresses is society, the question can be posed in terms that bring out the difficulty more clearly, as follows: What could have made social life such an important source of logical life? Nothing predisposed society for this role, it would seem, since it is obvious that men did not come together for the purpose of satisfying speculative needs.

Some will think it reckless of me to broach a problem of such complexity here. For the treatment it deserves to be possible, the sociological conditions of knowledge would have to be better known than they are. We can only begin to discern a few of those conditions. However, the question is so

*The first edition says *la foi*—"faith"; the second says *la loi*—"law."

important and so directly implied by everything that has gone before that I must make an effort not to leave it without an answer. Perhaps, moreover, it may be possible to set forth even now a few general principles of a kind that may at least shed light on the solution.

The basic material of logical thought is concepts. To try to discover how society could have played a role in the genesis of logical thought therefore amounts to asking how it can have taken part in the formation of concepts.

If we see the concept only as a general idea, as is most usually the case, the problem seems insoluble. By his own means, the individual can indeed compare his perceptions or images and sift out what they have in common; in other words, he can generalize. So it is not easy to see why generalization should be possible only in and through society. But, first of all, it is inadmissible that logical thought should be characterized exclusively by the wider scope of the representations that constitute it. If there is nothing logical about the particular ideas, why would the general ones be any different? The general exists only in the particular; it is the particular, simplified and stripped down. The general, then, cannot have virtues and privileges that the particular does not have. Inversely, if conceptual thought can be applied to genus, species, and variety, however small, why could it not extend to the individual, that is, to the limit toward which the idea tends in proportion as its scope narrows? As a matter of fact, there are a good many concepts that have individual objects. In every kind of religion, the gods are individualities distinct from one another; they are nevertheless conceived, not perceived. Each people imagines its historical or legendary heroes in a certain fashion, which is historically variable, and these representations are conceptual. Finally, each of us has a certain notion of the individuals with whom he is in contact—their character, their appearance, and the distinctive traits of their physical and moral temperaments. Such notions are true concepts. No doubt, they are in general rather crudely formed; but even among scientific concepts, are there many that are perfectly adequate to their objects? In this regard, our own concepts and those of science differ only in degree.

Therefore, the concept must be defined by other traits. The following properties distinguish it from tangible representations of any sort—sensations, perceptions, or images.

Sense representations are in perpetual flux; they come and go like the ripples of a stream, not staying the same even as long as they last. Each is linked with the exact moment in which it occurs. We are never assured of retrieving a perception in the same way we felt it the first time; for even if the thing perceived is unchanged, we ourselves are no longer the same. The concept, on the other hand, is somehow outside time and change; it is shielded

from all such disturbance; one might say that it is in a different region of the mind, a region that is calmer and more serene. The concept does not move on its own by an internal, spontaneous development; quite the contrary, it resists change. It is a way of thinking that at any given moment in time is fixed and crystallized.[8] To the extent that it is what it has to be, it is unchangeable. If it does change, change does not come about because of its nature but because we have discovered some imperfection in it, because it needs to be rectified. The system of concepts with which we think in everyday life is the one the vocabulary of our mother tongue expresses, for each word translates a concept. Language is fixed; it changes but slowly, and, hence, the same is true of the conceptual organization it translates. The scientist finds himself in the same position vis-à-vis the special terminology used by the science to which he is committed, and consequently vis-à-vis the special system of concepts to which that terminology corresponds. He may innovate, of course, but his innovations always do a certain violence to established ways of thinking.

At the same time as being relatively unchangeable, a concept is universal, or at least universalizable. A concept is not my concept; it is common to me and other men or at least can be communicated to them. It is impossible for me to make a sensation pass from my consciousness into someone else's; it is closely dependent on my body and personality and cannot be detached from them. All I can do is invite another person to set himself before the same object as I and open himself to its influence. By contrast, conversation and intellectual dealings among men consist in an exchange of concepts. The concept is, in essence, an impersonal representation. By means of it, human intelligences communicate.[9]

Defined in that way, the nature of the concept bespeaks its origins. It is common to all because it is the work of the community. It does not bear the imprint of any individual intellect, since it is fashioned by a single intellect in which all the others meet, and to which they come, as it were, for nourishment. If it has greater stability than sensations or images, that is so because collective representations are more stable than individual ones; for while the

[8]William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, I [New York, Macmillan, 1890], p. 464.

[9]This universality of the concept must not be confused with its generality. The two are very different things. What I call universality is the property the concept has of being communicated to a number of minds and indeed to all minds, in principle. That communicability is altogether independent of its scope. A concept that applies only to a single object, one whose scope is therefore minimal, can be universal in the sense that it is the same for all minds: The concept of a deity is of this sort.

individual is sensitive to even slight changes in his internal or external environment, only quite weighty events can succeed in changing the mental equilibrium of society. Whenever we are in the presence of a *type*[10] of thought or action that presses uniformly on individual intellects or wills, that pressure on the individual reveals the intervention of the collectivity. Further, I said before that the concepts with which we routinely think are those deposited in the vocabulary. It is beyond doubt that speech, and hence the system of concepts it translates, is the product of a collective elaboration. What it expresses is the manner in which society as a whole conceives the objects of experience. The notions corresponding to the various elements of language are therefore collective representations.

The very content of these notions testifies in the same way. Indeed, there are scarcely any words, even among those we most commonly use, whose meaning does not to some degree go beyond the limits of our personal experience. Often a term expresses things we have never perceived and experiences we have never had or never witnessed. Even when we know certain of the objects to which the term refers, we know them only as particular examples that serve to illustrate the idea but that would never have been enough to form it by themselves. There is a whole science condensed in words then, a science that is more than individual; and it so far surpasses me that I cannot even make all the results my own. Who of us knows all the words of the language he speaks and the full meaning of each word?

This point enables me to define the sense in which I say that concepts are collective representations. If they are common to an entire social group, it is not because they are a simple average of the corresponding individual representations; if they were that, they would be of poorer intellectual content than individual representations, whereas they are in fact replete with knowledge surpassing that of the average individual. Concepts are not abstract things that have reality only in particular circumstances. They are representations just as concrete as any the individual can make of his own environment, for they correspond to the way in which the special being that is society thinks about the things of its own experience. If, in fact, concepts most often are general ideas, if they express categories and classes rather than partic-

[10]Some will object that, in the individual, ways of acting or thinking often become fixed and crystallized as habits that resist change, through the effect of repetition alone. But habit is only a tendency to repeat an action or an idea automatically whenever the same circumstances reactivate it; habit does not imply that the idea or action is constituted in the state of exemplary types, proposed or imposed on the mind or will. It is only when a type of this sort is preestablished—that is, when a rule or norm is instituted—that the workings of society can and must be presumed.

ular objects, that is because individual and variable characteristics of beings are rarely of interest to society. Because of its very scope, society can hardly be affected by any but their most general and lasting properties. Hence it is this general aspect that bears society's attention. It is in the nature of society most often to see things in large masses and in the form they take most generally. However, that generality is not indispensable; and, in any case, even when these representations have the generic character that is most usual for them, they are the work of society and are enriched by its experience.

This, furthermore, is what makes conceptual thought valuable to us. If the concepts were merely general ideas, they would not greatly enrich knowledge, for as I have already said, the general contains nothing more than the particular. But if they are collective representations, first and foremost, they add to what our personal experience can teach us all the wisdom and science that the collectivity has amassed over centuries. To think with concepts is not merely to see the real in its most general characteristics but to turn upon sensation a beam that lights, penetrates, and transforms it. To conceptualize a thing is to apprehend its essential elements better and to place it in the group to which it belongs. Each civilization has its own ordered system of concepts, which characterizes it. Before this system of ideas, the individual intellect is in the same situation as the νοῦς of Plato before the world of Ideas. He strives to assimilate them, for he needs them in order to deal with his fellow men, but this assimilation is always incomplete. Each of us sees them in his own way. Some escape us completely, remaining beyond our range of vision, while others are glimpsed in only some of their aspects. There are some, and indeed many, that we distort by thinking them. Since they are by nature collective, they cannot become individualized without being added to, modified, and consequently distorted. This is why we have so much difficulty understanding one another, and why, indeed often, we lie to one another unintentionally. This happens because we all use the same words without giving them the same meaning.

We can now begin to see society's share in the origin of logical thought. Logical thought is possible only when man has managed to go beyond the fleeting representations he owes to sense experience and in the end to conceive a whole world of stable ideals, the common ground of intelligences. To think logically, in fact, is always, in some measure, to think impersonally; it is also to think *sub specie aeternitatis.** Impersonality and stability: Such are the two characteristics of truth. Logical life obviously presupposes that man knows, at least confusedly, that there is a truth distinct from sense appear-

*Under the aspect of eternity.

ances. But how could he have arrived at any such idea? People proceed most often as though logical life must have appeared spontaneously, as soon as man opened his eyes upon the world. But there is nothing in direct experience to suggest it; indeed, everything opposes it. Thus, children and animals have not even a clue of it. History shows, furthermore, that it took centuries to emerge and take shape. In our Western world, only with the great thinkers of Greece did logical life for the first time become clearly conscious of itself and of the consequences it implies. And when the discovery came, it provoked wonderment, which Plato expressed in magnificent language. But even if it was only then that the idea was expressed in philosophical formulas, it necessarily existed before then as a vague awareness. Philosophers sought to clarify this awareness; they did not create it. To have been able to reflect upon and analyze it, they must have been given it, and the question is where this awareness came from, that is, on what experience it was based. The answer is collective experience. It is in the form of collective thought that impersonal thought revealed itself to humanity for the first time, and by what other route that revelation could have come about is hard to see.

Solely because society exists, there also exists beyond sensations and images a whole system of representations that possess marvelous properties. By means of them, men understand one another, and minds gain access to one another. They have a kind of force and moral authority by virtue of which they impose themselves upon individual minds. From then on, the individual realizes, at least dimly, that above his private representations there is a world of type-ideas according to which he has to regulate his own; he glimpses a whole intellectual world in which he participates but which is greater than he. This is a first intuition of the realm of truth. As soon as he became aware of that higher intellectuality, he set about scrutinizing its nature, trying to find out how these preeminent representations came by their prerogatives. And to the extent that he thought he had discovered their causes, he undertook to put those causes to work himself and, by himself, to draw the conclusions they lead to; that is, he gave himself the right to make concepts. In this way, the faculty of conceptualization individualized itself. But to understand the origins of that faculty, it must be linked to the social conditions on which it depends.

Some will object that I am presenting the concept in only one of its aspects—that its role is to ensure not only agreement among minds but also, and even more, their agreement with the nature of things. A concept would seem not to fulfill its *raison d'être* unless it was true—that is, objective—and its impersonality to be only a consequence of its objectivity. It is in things conceived as adequately as they can be that minds should communicate. I do not deny that conceptual evolution moves partly in this direction. The con-

cept that is at first held to be true because it is collective tends not to become collective unless it is held to be true: We demand its credentials before giving it credence. But first, we must not lose sight of the fact that, even today, the great majority of the concepts that we use are not methodically constructed; we come by them from language, that is, from common experience, and without subjecting them to any prior critique. Concepts that are scientifically wrought and criticized are always in a very small minority. Second, there are only differences of degree between those concepts and the ones that draw all their authority only from the fact of being collective. A collective representation, because it is collective, already presents assurances of objectivity. Not without reason has it been able to generalize and maintain itself with such persistence. If it was in disagreement with the nature of things, it would not have succeeded in acquiring broad and prolonged dominion over minds. Fundamentally, what makes scientific concepts inspire confidence is that they can be tested methodically. A collective representation necessarily undergoes a test that is repeated indefinitely. The men who adhere to a collective representation verify it through their own experience. Thus it cannot be wholly inadequate to its object. Certainly it may explain that object with imperfect symbols, but scientific symbols are themselves never more than approximate. The method I follow in the study of religious phenomena is based on exactly this principle. I regard it as axiomatic that, strange though religious beliefs may sometimes be in appearance, they contain their own truth, which must be uncovered.[11]

Inversely, even when constructed in accordance with all the rules of science, concepts are far from taking their authority from their objective value alone. To be believed, it is not enough that they be true. If they are not in harmony with other beliefs and other opinions—in short, with the whole set of collective representations—they will be denied; minds will be closed to them; as a result, they will be and yet not be. If bearing the seal of science is usually enough today to gain a sort of privileged credibility, that is because we have faith in science. But that faith is not essentially different from religious faith. The value we attribute to science depends, in the last analysis, upon the idea we collectively have of its nature and role in life, which is to say that it expresses a state of opinion. The reason is that everything in social life rests on opinion, including science itself. To be sure, we can make opinion an object of study and create a science of it; that is what sociology principally consists in. Still the science of opinion does not create opinion, but

[11]From the very fact that a representation has a social origin, we see how far it is from being without objective value.

can only clarify it and make it more conscious of itself. In this way, it is true, science can lead opinion to change, but science remains the product of opinion even at the moment it seems to rule opinion; for as I have shown, science draws the strength it takes to act upon opinion from opinion itself.[12]

To say that concepts express the manner in which society conceives of things is also to say that conceptual thought is contemporaneous with humanity. Therefore, I refuse to see them as the product of more or less modern culture. A man who did not think with concepts would not be a man, for he would not be a social being. Limited to individual perceptions alone, he would not be distinct from an animal. It has been possible to uphold the contrary thesis only because the concept has been defined by features that are not fundamental to it. The concept has been identified with the general idea[13]—and with the clearly delimited and circumscribed general idea.[14] In that case, the lower societies could appear to be ignorant of the concept properly so-called, for they have only undeveloped processes of generalization, and the notions they use are generally not well defined. Yet most of our present concepts also lack clear definition; we can barely force ourselves to define them except in debate, and when we are operating as scientists. Besides, we have seen that conceptualizing is not the same as generalizing. To think conceptually is not merely to isolate and group the features common to a certain number of objects. It is also to subsume the variable under the permanent and the individual under the social. And since logical thought begins with the concept, it follows that logical thought has always existed; there has been no historical period when men lived in chronic confusion and contradiction. Certainly, the different features of logic in different historical periods cannot be overemphasized; logic evolves as societies themselves evolve. But however real, the differences should not cause us to miss the similarities, which are no less fundamental.

IV

We can now take up a final question, which was set out in the Introduction[15] and has remained more or less implicit throughout this book. We have seen

[12]Cf. above, p. 210.

[13][Lucien] Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* [Paris, F. Alcan, 1910], pp. 131–138.

[14]Ibid., p. 446.

[15]See above, p. 12.

that at least certain of the categories are social things. The question is where they got this trait.

No doubt, since they are themselves concepts, we easily understand that they are the work of the collectivity. Indeed, no concepts display the distinguishing marks of a collective representation to the same degree. Indeed, their stability and impersonality are such that they have often been taken to be absolutely universal and immutable. Besides, since they express the fundamental conditions of understanding between minds, it seems obvious that they could only have been fashioned by society.

Yet the problem is more complex, insofar as the categories are concerned, for they are social in another sense and, as it were, to a higher degree. Not only do they come from society, but the very things they express are social. It is not only that they are instituted by society but also that their content is various aspects of the social being. The category of genus was at first indistinct from the concept of human group; the category of time has the rhythm of social life as its basis; the space society occupies provided the raw material for the category of space; collective force was the prototype for the concept of effective force, an essential element in the category of causality. Nevertheless, application to the social realm is not the only function of the categories; they extend to reality as a whole. Why is it, then, that the models on which they were built have been borrowed from society?

The answer is that these are preeminent concepts that have a preponderant role in knowledge. Indeed, the function of the categories is to govern and contain the other concepts. They form the permanent framework of mental life. But to encompass such an object, they must be modeled on a reality of equally wide scope.

Doubtless the relations they express exist, implicitly, in individual consciousnesses. The individual lives in time and, as I have said, has a certain sense of temporal orientation. He is at a definite point in space, and it has been possible to hold, with good reason, that all sensations have a spatial aspect.[16] He has a sense of similarity. Similar representations attract one another and come together within him, and the new representation formed by their coming together has a certain generic quality. We also have the sensation of a certain regularity in the order of succession in phenomena; even the animal is not incapable of that. But all these relationships are personal to the individual who is involved with them, and hence the notion he can gain from them can in no case stretch beyond his narrow horizon. The generic images

[16]James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. I, p. 134.

that form in my consciousness through the coming together of similar images represent only those objects that I have perceived directly; nothing is there to give me the idea of a class, that is, a framework able to encompass the *whole* group of all possible objects that fulfill the same criterion. I would still need to have the idea of group beforehand, an idea that the mere unfolding of our inner life cannot be sufficient to arouse in us. Above all, there is no individual experience, no matter how broad or prolonged, that could make us even suspect the existence of a whole genus embracing the universality of beings, and in which the other genera would be only species coordinated among, or subordinated to, one another. This notion of the *whole*, which lies at the basis of the classifications I have cited, cannot come to us from the individual himself, who is only a part of the whole and never comes in contact with more than an infinitesimal part of reality. And yet there is perhaps no more fundamental category. Since the role of the categories is to encompass all the other concepts, the category par excellence would indeed seem to be the very concept of *totality*. The theorists of knowledge usually postulate totality as if it is self-evident, but in fact it goes infinitely beyond the content of each individual consciousness, taken separately.

For the same reasons, the space I know through my senses, where I am at the center and where everything is arranged in relation to me, could not be the space as a whole, which contains all the individual spaces and in which, moreover, those individual spaces are coordinated in relation to impersonal reference points common to all individuals. Similarly, the concrete duration that I feel passing within and with me could never give me the idea of time as a whole. The first expresses only the rhythm of my individual life; the second must correspond to the rhythm of a life that is not that of any particular individual, but one in which all participate.[17] In the same way, finally, the regularities that I can perceive in the way my sensations follow one another may very well have value for me; they explain why I tend to wait for the second when the first of two phenomena whose constant conjunction I have experienced is given to me. But that state of personal expectancy cannot be assimilated to the conception of a universal order of succession that imposes itself on all minds and all events.

Since the world expressed by the whole system of concepts is the world society conceives of, only society can provide us with the most general no-

[17]Space and time are often spoken of as if they were only concrete extension and duration, such as individual consciousness can experience them, but impoverished through abstraction. In reality, they are representations of an entirely different kind—constructed out of different elements, following a very different plan, and with ends in view that are different as well.

tions in terms of which that world must be conceived. Only a subject that encompasses every individual subject has the capacity to encompass such an object. Since the universe exists only insofar as it is thought of and since it is thought of in its totality only by society, it takes its place within society; it becomes an element of society's inner life, and thus is itself the total genus outside which nothing exists. The concept of totality is but the concept of society in abstract form. It is the whole that includes all things, the supreme class that contains all other classes. Such is the underlying principle on which rest those primitive classifications that situated and classified beings of all the kingdoms, in the same right as men.[18] But if the world is in the society, the space society occupies merges with space as a whole. As we have seen, each thing does indeed have its assigned place in social space. But what brings out the extent to which that total space differs from those concrete expanses that our senses cause us to perceive is the fact that localization is wholly ideal and in no way resembles what it might be if it was dictated to us by sense experience.[19] For the same reason, the rhythm of collective life governs and contains the various rhythms of all the elementary lives of which it is the result; consequently, the time that expresses it governs and contains all the individual times. It is time as a whole.

For a long time, the world's history was only a different aspect of society's history. The one begins with the other; the periods of the world are determined by the periods of the society. Measuring that impersonal and global duration and setting reference points in relation to which it is divided and organized are society's movements of concentration or dispersal—or, more generally, the periodic need for collective renewal. If those critical moments are most often attached to some physical phenomenon, such as the regular reappearance of a certain star or the alternation of the seasons, it is because objective signs are needed to make that essentially social organization tangible for all. Similarly, the causal relation becomes independent of any individual consciousness from the moment it is collectively established by the group; it hovers above all the minds and all the individual events. It is a law having impersonal validity. I have shown that the law of causality seems to have been born in just this way.

There is another reason why the constituent elements of the categories must have been taken from social life: The relationships they express could

[18]In all probability, the concepts of totality, society, and deity are at bottom merely different aspects of the same notion.

[19]See "Classifications primitives" [Emile Durkheim, "De Quelques formes primitives de classification," *AS*, vol. VI, 1903], pp. 40ff.

not become conscious relationships except in and through society. Even if, in a sense, they are immanent in the life of the individual, the individual had neither reason nor means to grasp them, think about them, make them explicit, and build them up into distinct notions. To orient his individual self in space and to know at what times to satisfy various physical needs, he had no need for a conceptual representation of time or space, once and for all. Many animals know how to find their way back to the paths leading to places familiar to them; they return there at the right time yet without their having any category at all; sensations are enough to guide them automatically. These would be sufficient for man as well if his movements had to satisfy individual needs alone. In order to recognize that one thing resembles others with which we are already acquainted, we need not arrange them in genera and species. The way in which similar images call one another forth and merge are enough to create the feeling of resemblance. The impression of *déjà vu*, of something already experienced, implies no classification. In order to differentiate between those things we must seek after and those we must flee, we have no need to join the effects of both to their causes with a logical link, if individual convenience alone is at stake. Purely empirical sequences, strong connections between concrete representations, are equally sure guides to the will. Not only does the animal have no others, but our own individual practice quite often presupposes nothing more. The wise man is one who has a very clear sense of what he must do but one that he would usually be unable to translate into a law.

It is otherwise with society. Society is possible only if the individuals and things that make it up are divided among different groups, which is to say genera,* and if those groups themselves are classified in relation to one another. Thus, society presupposes a conscious organization of itself that is nothing other than a classification. That organization of society is naturally passed on to the space it occupies. To forestall conflict, a definite portion of space must be assigned to each individual group. In other words, the space must be divided, differentiated, and oriented, and these divisions and orientations must be known to all. In addition, every call to a feast, hunt, or military expedition implies that dates are fixed and agreed upon and, therefore, that a common time is established that everyone conceives in the same way.

*Here and later in the paragraph (as well as twice previously in this chapter), Durkheim shifts to the word *classe*. Since the English term "class" can imply economic differentiation, which would move the argument out of its present context, I have used the term "genus" throughout. Nonetheless, what the economic sense of "class" would add or subtract should be kept in mind—for example, in the end of the last sentence in this paragraph.

Finally, the collaboration of several in pursuit of a common goal is possible only if there is agreement on the relation between that goal and the means that make its achievement possible—that is, if a single causal relation is accepted by all who are working together in the same enterprise. It is not surprising, then, that social time, social space, social genera [*classes*], and collective causality should be the basis of the corresponding categories, since it is in their social forms that they were first conceived with any degree of clarity by human consciousness.

To summarize, society is by no means the illogical or alogical, inconsistent, and changeable being that people too often like to imagine. Quite the contrary, the collective consciousness is the highest form of psychic life, for it is a consciousness of consciousnesses. Being outside and above individual and local contingencies, collective consciousness sees things only in their permanent and fundamental aspect,* which it crystallizes in ideas that can be communicated. At the same time as it sees from above, it sees far ahead; at every moment, it embraces all known reality; that is why it alone can furnish the intellect with frameworks that are applicable to the totality of beings and that enable us to build concepts about them. It does not create these frameworks artificially but finds them within itself, merely becoming conscious of them. They express ways of being that are met with at all levels of the real but that appear with full clarity only at the pinnacle, because the extreme complexity of the psychic life that unfolds there requires a more highly developed consciousness. Therefore, to attribute social origins to logical thought is not to denigrate it, diminish its worth, or reduce it to no more than a system of artificial combinations—but is, quite the contrary, to relate logical thought to a cause that naturally implies it. Assuredly, this is not to say that notions worked out in that way could be directly adequate to their objects. If society is something universal as compared to the individual, it is still an individuality, having its own form and idiosyncrasies; it is a particular subject and, consequently, one that particularizes what it thinks of. So even collective representations contain subjective elements, and if they are to become closer to things, they must be gradually refined. But crude as these representations might have been at first, it remains true that with them came the seed of a new mode of thinking, one to which the individual could never have lifted himself on his own. The way was open to stable, impersonal, ordered thought, which had only to develop its own special nature from then on.

*Note the similarity between this formulation about *conscience collective* as "a permanent and fundamental" aspect of society and a similar one about religion as a "fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity" in the Introduction (above, p. 1).

Moreover, the factors that have brought about this development seem to be no different in kind from those that brought it forth originally. If logical thought tends more and more to jettison the subjective and personal elements that were launched with it, the reason is not that extrasocial factors have entered in but far more that a new kind of social life gradually developed: international life, whose effect even then was to universalize religious beliefs. As that international life broadens, so does the collective horizon; society no longer appears as the whole, par excellence, and becomes part of a whole that is more vast, with frontiers that are indefinite and capable of rolling back indefinitely. As a result, things can no longer fit within the social frames where they were originally classified; they must be organized with principles of their own; logical organization thus differentiates itself from social organization and becomes autonomous. This, it seems, is how the bond that at first joined thought to defined collective entities becomes more and more detached and how, consequently, it becomes ever more impersonal and universalizes.* Thought that is truly and peculiarly human is not a primitive given, therefore, but a product of history; it is an ideal limit to which we come ever closer but in all probability will never attain.

Thus, the sort of antimony that has so often been accepted, between science on one hand and religion and morality on the other, is far from the case. In reality, these different modes of human activity derive from one and the same source. This Kant well understood, and therefore he considered speculative reason and practical reason to be two different aspects of the same faculty. According to him, what joins them is that both are oriented toward the universal. To think rationally is to think according to the laws that are self-evident to all reasonable beings; to act morally is to act according to maxims that can be extended without contradiction to all wills. In other words, both science and morality imply that the individual is capable of lifting himself above his own point of view and participating in an impersonal life. And, indeed, herein we undoubtedly have a trait that is common to all the higher forms of thought and action. But what Kantianism does not explain is where the sort of contradiction that man thus embodies comes from. Why must he do violence to himself in order to transcend his individual nature; and inversely, why must impersonal law weaken as it becomes incarnate in individuals? Will it be said that there are two antagonistic worlds in which we participate equally: the world of matter and sense, on the one hand, and on the other, that of pure and impersonal reason? But that is to repeat the ques-

*This sentence was omitted from the Swain translation but is in both French versions of *Formes*.

tion in terms that are barely different: for the point precisely is to know why we must* lead those two lives concurrently. Since the two worlds seem to contradict one another, why do they not remain separate from one another, and what makes it necessary for them to interpenetrate, despite their antagonism? The hypothesis of the Fall, with all its attendant difficulties, is the only explanation of that singular necessity that has ever been offered—and it need not be recited here.

On the other hand, the mystery dissolves once we have acknowledged that impersonal reason is but collective thought by another name. Collective thought is possible only through the coming together of individuals; hence it presupposes the individuals, and they in turn presuppose it, because they cannot sustain themselves except by coming together. The realm of impersonal aims and truths cannot be realized except through the collaboration of individual wills and sensibilities;† the reasons they participate and the reasons they collaborate are the same. In short, there is something impersonal in us because there is something social in us, and since social life embraces both representations and practices, that impersonality extends quite naturally to ideas as well as to actions.

Some will be astonished, perhaps, to see me connecting the highest forms of the human mind with society. The cause seems quite humble as compared to the value we attribute to the effect. So great is the distance between the world of the senses and appetites on the one hand, and the world of reason and morality on the other, that it seems the second could have been added to the first only by an act of creation. But to attribute to society this dominant role in the origin of our nature is not to deny that creation. Society does indeed have at its disposal a creative power that no observable being can match. Every creation, unless it is a mystical procedure that escapes science and intellect, is in fact the product of a synthesis. If the syntheses of particular representations that occur within each individual consciousness are already, in and of themselves, productive of novelties, how much more effective must societies be—these vast syntheses of entire consciousnesses! A society is the most powerful collection of physical and moral forces that we can observe in nature. Such riches of various materials, so highly concentrated, are to be found nowhere else. It is not surprising, then, that a higher life develops out of them, a life that acts on the elements from which it is made, thereby raising them to a higher form of life and transforming them.

*The second edition says *Il nous fait* instead of *il nous faut,* surely a typographical error.

†The phrase "and sensibilities" does not appear in Swain.

Thus, it seems the vocation of sociology is to open a new way to the science of man. Until now, we stood before these alternatives: either to explain the higher and specific faculties of man by relating them to lower forms of being—reason to sense, mind to matter—which amounted to denying their specificity; or to connect them with some reality above experience that we postulated but whose existence no observation can establish. What placed the mind in that difficulty is that the individual was taken to be *finis naturae.** It seemed there was nothing beyond him, at least nothing that science might discover. But a new way of explaining man becomes possible as soon as we recognize that above the individual there is society, and that society is a system of active forces—not a nominal being, and not a creation of the mind. To preserve man's distinctive attributes, it is no longer necessary to place them outside experience. Before drawing that extreme conclusion, at any rate, it is best to find out whether that which is in the individual but surpasses him may not come to him from that supraindividual, yet concretely experienced, reality that is society. To be sure, it cannot be said at this moment how far these explanations can be extended and if they can lay every problem to rest. Equally, however, it is impossible to mark in advance a limit beyond which they cannot go. What must be done is to try out the hypothesis and test it against the facts as methodically as possible. This is what I have tried to do.

*The culmination of nature.