The Elementary Forms of Religious Life

EMILE DURKHEIM

A New Translation by KAREN E. FIELDS

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Translated and with an Introduction by
Karen E. Fields

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BOOK III: THE PRINCIPAL MODES OF RITUAL CONDUCT

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	*American Anthropologist*
AAAS	Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science
AMNH	*Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History*
APS	*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
ArA	*Archaeologia Americana*
AS	*Année sociologique*
BAAS	British Association for the Advancement of Science (Reports)
BAE	*Reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology*
CJ	*Cambrian Journal*
CNAE	*Contributions to North American Ethnology*
FR	*Fortnightly Review*
HLCAPS	*Transactions of the Historical and Literary Committee of the American Philosophical Society*
JA	*Journal asiatique*
JAI	*Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*
QGJ	*Queensland Geographical Journal*
RAM	*Records of the Australian Museum*
RCI	*Revue coloniale internationale*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RIS	*Revista italiana di sociologia*
RMM	*Revue de morale et de métaphysique*
RNM	*Report of the U.S. National Museum*
RP	*Revue philosophique*
RSC	*Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*
RSI	*Report of the Smithsonian Institution*
RSNSW	*Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*

RSSA	*Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*
RSV	*Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*
TICHR	*Transactions of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions*
VGJ	*Victorian Geographical Journal*
ZE	*Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*
ZV	*Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie*
ZDP	*Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION:

RELIGION AS AN EMINENTLY SOCIAL THING

> [W]hat I ask of the free thinker is that he should confront religion in the same mental state as the believer. . . . [H]e who does not bring to the study of religion a sort of religious sentiment cannot speak about it! He is like a blind man trying to talk about colour.
>
> Now I shall address the free believer. . . . Without going so far as to disbelieve the formula we believe in, we must forget it provisionally, reserving the right to return to it later. Having once escaped from this tyranny, we are no longer in danger of perpetrating the error and injustice into which certain believers have fallen who have called my way of interpreting religion basically irreligious. There cannot be a rational interpretation of religion which is fundamentally irreligious; an irreligious interpretation of religion would be an interpretation which denied the phenomenon it was trying to explain.[1]
>
> Emile Durkheim (1858–1917)

Easily the most striking feature of Emile Durkheim's 1912 masterpiece, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse,* is his insistence that religions are founded on and express "the real." The most casual skim through the book's very first pages—even through the Contents—will reveal that insistence. And it is continually present, like a heartbeat. At the same time, however, as a reader might well mutter, the most striking feature of religions is that they are full to overflowing with spectacular improbabilities. As if anticipating that thought, Durkheim challenges it from the start: "There are no religions that are false." More than that: "If [religion] had not been grounded in the nature of things, in those very things it would have met resistance that it could not have over-

come."[2] A hostile reviewer writing in the *American Anthropologist* said flatly that Durkheim's "search for a reality underlying religion does not seem to rest on a firm logical basis."[3] Judgment about the logic of that search belongs to readers of Durkheim's greatest book, which I offer in its first full retranslation since Joseph Ward Swain's, in 1915.[4]

To gauge Durkheim's claim about the roots of religion in "the real," it will be necessary to follow an argument that is provocative through and through. Pressing that claim to its very limit, Durkheim announces that his case in point will be the totemic religions of Australia, with totemism's jarring identification of human beings and animals or plants—on its face, to readers in 1912, anything but a religious milieu with anything like credible roots in the real and, to some of them, not even a religious milieu. *Au contraire,* cautions Durkheim. Totemism qualifies as a religion; furthermore, all religions are "true after their own fashion," and all, including totemism, meet "needs" (*besoins*) that are part and parcel of human life.[5] Then or now, anyone encountering the first pages of *Formes* for the first time must wonder straightaway what he intends by "the real," or by "needs" built into the human makeup that religion fulfills. Here are claims likely to draw the religiously committed and the religiously uncommitted to the edge of their seats. From the start, it is clear that the questions Durkheim has set himself about religion concern the nature of human life and the nature of "the real." (From now on I drop the quotation marks around the phrase, noting that part of Durkheim's agenda in *Formes* is to apply his conception of the real to all social forms of existence. Philosophers in Durkheim's milieu were reworking the old polarity of appearance versus essence, as handled by Immanuel Kant. We can flash forward to Edmund Husserl, and again, regarding the social world specifically, from Husserl to Alfred Schutz.)

It is equally clear from the start that received ideas offer Durkheim few intellectual park benches along the route toward the answers. The opening chapters (Book One) define religion and totemism. They then demolish two earlier families of theory, animism and naturism, certain of whose received ideas about what is fundamental to religion still have a certain currency—for example, naturism's thesis that religion arises from human awe before the grandeur of the natural world. Gone there and then (to many, maddeningly) is religion as "ultimate concern" and as encounter with a power transcending the human, or with "the holy."[6] The middle chapters (Book Two) systematically examine what Durkheim calls *représentations collectives:* shared mental constructs with the help of which, he argues, human beings collectively view themselves, each other, and the natural world. Having adopted totemism as an especially challenging system of collective representations,

Durkheim develops a theory of how society constitutes itself, one that is simultaneously (and in his view, necessarily) a theory of how human mentality constitutes itself. That theory, in turn, encloses another, about those "unified systems" of *représentations* concerning nature and humanity that religions always contain.

The final chapters (Book Three) deal with forms of collective conduct that can be thought of as collective representations in action and, at the same time, as action that makes collective representations real in individual minds. Here are echoes of Marx, in *The German Ideology,* where reality is above all *done:* "Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence." As though hearing that echo, Durkheim cautions against understanding his thought as "merely a refurnishment of historical materialism."[7] In fact, his common ground with Marx on the subject of religion is far from negligible and yet far from total. For Durkheim, religions exist because human beings exist only as social beings and in a humanly shaped world. Religion is "an eminently social thing."[8]

In the Australians' world, as we come to know it through *Formes,* to have the clan name Kangaroo is not merely to postulate an amazing inner bond of shared essence with animals, whose inherent distinctness from humans is obvious. It is also to postulate a just as amazing inner bond of shared essence with other humans, by sharing a name. Human individuals are inherently distinct from one another, and so the potential for mutually recognized identity is far from obvious. On this subject, the early critical voice is unamazed, settling for well-worn park benches of thought: "The experience of all times and places teaches that the rapport of the *individual, as such,* with the *religious object* is of prime importance in *religious situations.*"[9] But Durkheim's challenge in *Formes* is to detect questions, not self-evidences, in phrases like "individual, as such," "religious object," and "religious situation." His expedition goes to a place where "[t]he kangaroo is only an animal like any other; but, for the Kangaroo people, it has within itself a principle that sets it apart from other beings, and this principle only exists in and through the minds of those who think of it." On that expedition, "in a philosophical sense, the same is true of any thing; for things exist only through representation."[10]

By many, usually benchless, routes through Australian ethnography, Durkheim brings us to what he intends by the real that human beings in general come to know through the distinctively human means of knowing. Those means begin, he argues, with human sociability. Society is the form in which nature produced humankind, and religion is reason's first harbor. In *Formes,* we meet the mind as a collective product and science as an offspring of religion. In those very processes of abstraction that enabled the Australian

to imagine who he was by imagining his relationship with other Australians and with the natural world, we meet the beginning of abstract thought. And we meet the concept, ours via the social treasury of language, defined as "a beam that lights, penetrates, and transforms" sensation.[11] Durkheim's querying of the Australians and their totems is thus the point of departure for his investigation into distinctive traits of humankind: reason, identity, and community—three subjects that we tend neither to place under the heading "religion" nor to treat together. Few people today would end a sentence that begins, "Religion is . . ." in the way he does: ". . . above all, a system of ideas by which men imagine the society of which they are members and the obscure yet intimate relations they have with it."[12]

If Durkheim's sustained insistence on religions' basis in the real is the most striking feature of *Formes,* his provocative, sharp-witted mode of exposition comes a close second.[13] And if the book has a heartbeat about the nature of the real, it has a rhetorical body built to subvert received notions. As he admits in the Introduction, some readers were bound to find his approach "unorthodox."[14] He chose to explore huge questions about humankind in general via the stone-tool-using specificity of Aboriginal Australia, and his argument moves in ways that could not fail to scandalize many readers, on various grounds. We can begin to feel the specific texture of *scandale* if we consider another hostile reviewer's observation about the academically orthodox view of totemism, in a long article titled "Dogmatic Atheism in the Sociology of Religion." There we learn that totemism, "[a]s currently taught in Anglican universities, . . . appeared to fit with the providential mission of the Jews and the possibility of Christian revelation."[15] In other words, some scholars dealt with totemism by making it into a "Christianity in embryo." Being born and reared a Jew and the son of a rabbi, Durkheim lacked the nearsightedness that made totemism as embryonic Christianity seem a necessary lens. What is more, he doubtless had no investment in preserving high evolutionary rank for any religion at all. As a young man, he had rejected religious commitment outright, a fact to which the article's neon title alludes.

For the scholars referred to and addressed in that article, in any case, totemism was anything but well adapted to showing religion's roots in the real. It could be relegated to the category of magic, as the critic points out that Herbert Spencer did (which Durkheim disputed, since that amounted to disconnecting it from the real).[16] Or it could be adapted to that role if imagined with an arrow on it, pointing forward in an evolutionist sense to religions whose connections with the real seemed a priori more credible than totemism's. But there stood Durkheim, firing argument in two directions: claiming that religion would not have survived if it had not been grounded

in the real and claiming to study religion in general by juxtaposing the allegedly lowest and highest. For many reasons, in that unself-consciously self-satisfied era, *Formes* must have been a shocker. Looking back, the French sociologist Raymond Aron described the immediate reaction to it in France as *violent*. Being highly sophisticated, Durkheim no doubt expected that. Notice the rhetorical sandpits in the quotations I used as an epigraph, taken from extemporaneous remarks he made in 1914 to the Union of Free Thinkers and Free Believers. Now picture the sinuous road to be traveled in any attempt to represent him in a comprehensive portrait as the great contributor to empirical science that he was.

Durkheim's commentators have often expressed dismay about the rhetorical mode in which *Formes* is written. Dominick LaCapra spoke of an "oceanic form of discourse" in a text "which has had the power to allure and repel at the same time."[17] Steven Lukes wrote of Durkheim's style that it "often tends to caricature his thought: he often expressed his ideas in an extreme or figurative manner."[18] I imagine that Talcott Parsons was reacting in part to some of those very qualities when he claimed, essentially, that in *Formes* Durkheim was feeling his way uneasily between the naiveté of positivism and something far smarter.[19] Raymond Aron disliked the book, said so in no uncertain terms (including the term "impiety"), and professed to be so unsure in his understanding of it that he deliberately included long sections of verbatim quotation, to enable more sympathetic readers to do better than he.[20] I will not tarry over those who, finding the posture of *Formes* enigmatic, respond by characterizing the book as mystical, metaphysical, and even theological, charges that must make Durkheim's soul shake its head. If it is true that he rejected not only religion but also his family's intention for him to become a rabbi, in his father's and grandfather's footsteps, he must have paid full fare for a secular voyage through the mysteries and commonplaces of life.[21] As far as I am concerned, it is sufficient to say that Durkheim was experimenting with ideas that deeply mattered to him, and there is every reason to imagine that he often ran up against the expressive limits of his medium. Up against those same limits, no less a sociological theorist than Talcott Parsons used the unsettling term "nonempirical reality."[22]

Durkheim's rhetoric is often remarked upon but generally not built into the systematic commentary about him.[23] Traditional accounts usually stop at saying sociology was a new science at the turn of the century, Durkheim one of those battling to define a tenable version of its subject matter and method, and his mode (alas) polemical. But if polemic in the midst of developing something new is stigmatized as antithetical to systematic thought, then the very notion of systematic thought is impoverished. Left unimagined is the

sense of absorbing puzzles to be solved and a living sense of inspiration before it becomes "system." It is easy to see a calculated polemical edge in Durkheim's *Suicide,* where he tackles as a sociological puzzle an act that received notions even today hold to be quintessentially individual. Often noticed as well is the sinewy argument to be expected of a philosophically trained product of the Ecole normale supérieure, France's *crême de la crême* in higher education. But seldom imagined is what must have been the high humor of working against received ideas and toward fundamental truth. To miss those features is to miss the freshness of the work he did, at the time he was doing it: gone is the sense of experiment and excitement he shared with the many talented students he taught at the Sorbonne, and with the scholars who joined him in creating the celebrated journal *Année sociologique;* gone too is his wit on the page. If those elements are missed, *Formes* is by the same stroke uplifted as a classic and downgraded to a tome.

Durkheim breathed the air of turn-of-the-century Paris, a place that fizzed with experiments in artistic representation, and a time when philosophy, science, and art existed in nothing like today's isolation from one another.[24] Picasso painted his *Demoiselles d'Avignon* in 1907, launching cubism and, therewith, a new vocabulary for the art of the new century. It may turn out that illuminating connections can be drawn between Durkheim's transgressing the boundaries between "primitive" and "civilized" in the search for a vocabulary suited to comprehending, and then representing, the real, and Picasso's own encounters with those same boundaries as he reconceived perspective. To give attention to Durkheim's rhetorical leaps is not to show where he fell short as a systematic thinker; it is to amplify his voice and hear him better. In *Formes,* one of his tasks is to show how a kangaroo can be, at one and the same time, a powerful sacred being, a man or woman, and just a kangaroo—all in the real. His rhetorical tactics in representing these barely representable things are in themselves interesting to observe. That they have succeeded in some way accounts for the book's capacity over the years to motivate fruitful empirical work in a range of fields.

ANATOMY OF A CLASSIC

As a classic in the sociology and anthropology of religion, *Formes* is widely mentioned and characterized, if not so widely read. My purpose in undertaking a new translation is to re-present Durkheim's ideas about what he called the "religious nature of man" in the English of our own day while rendering Durkheim's French as faithfully as I can. I have undertaken this new

translation at a time when the serious study of religion has finally begun to return to center stage in our culture, after an unfortunate hiatus of many decades. My hope is that this book will be more widely read and studied, and not only by sociologists and anthropologists or scholars of religion. American postmodernist theorizers of discursive practices and representations will recognize through *Formes* the Durkheimian pedigree of Michel Foucault.[25] Psychologists will repeatedly glimpse old and not-so-old ways of thinking about phenomena that the scientific study of memory, identity, language, and intelligence must be able to account for. Philosophers will find old problems interestingly tackled, if not necessarily solved.[26]

My hope for a broadened readership raises a larger question, about *Formes* in particular and the genus "classic" to which it belongs: Why read classics? Of late, that question and sundry answers to it have framed a sometimes poisonous debate over which ancestors should be so honored in memory. This conversation is largely impersonal, as short on "I's" as it is long on impersonal, puritanical "shoulds"; it is outspoken about discipline but inarticulate about individual pleasure, and mute as the grave about excitement. Like broccoli, classics are said to be good for one, even if swallowed unwillingly. My view is that dead ancestors should stay dead to us unless pleasure and excitement come from getting to know them. While in the midst of this project, I heard Wynton Marsalis, the virtuoso classical and jazz trumpeter, tell a cautionary tale of honesty about the point of classics and about the work involved in translating them for new audiences. His introduction to some new settings of old work by Duke Ellington brought out problems that both bedevil such work and inspire its product.

To begin with, Marsalis said, he was unenthusiastic about Ellington. His friend, the choreographer Garth Fagan, invited him to see a rehearsal performance set to an old piece by Ellington. A period piece, Marsalis thought. "That's just some boring old ballroom music. I know I *should* want to hear it but I don't." But Fagan pressed, sure about his rendering. Marsalis went, and then reconsidered: "Everybody said Ellington was great. But what made him so great? Nobody said. Well, that night, I understood." He, in turn, trumpeted some "old ballroom music" to us, his audience. As Fagan had interpreted to Marsalis, so Marsalis interpreted to his own audience, who were invited to discover Ellington's greatness, partly through the original work itself but also with Marsalis present as a "translator," with all the complexities that implies. It was Marsalis's "translation" that gave us access to the greatness of some out-of-style music, and irremediably so, for we had no access to the music except by hearing someone render it in sound (unless we decided to experience the music by sight, from Ellington's page). No two renderings

could be the same. None could be exactly what Ellington meant. We cannot know exactly what he meant. The only certainty was that rendering the music freed it to win the audience over, or not to.

But what is true about music that begins its public life with popular audiences is not true about the high culture of old books. When that seems at stake, the answer to the question, "Why read classics?" too often hides behind the busy boredom of Ecclesiastes: "That which has been done is that which shall be done." I think otherwise. Every classic should be free to win the right to be read again with pleasure, not just to be set to labor as a captive servant of tradition, trapped in the highbrowed storage of a museum display. The case for studying old works now needs to be made now, partly through the manner of their presentation. If the classics really are good enough to keep reading, in spite of their age and flaws, then they are due the respect of being allowed to win their audience over. "Because they are classics" amounts to saying, "Because they are there." And that is the unhappy fate of captives in those Smithsonians of the mind that college reading lists can be, on permanent exhibition to pedants, connoisseurs, and cranky tourists, indiscriminately. Every schoolchild learns that Mount Everest was scaled "because it was there" and can understand from a distance what makes it "great." But the superlatives about great books are not the same. To know there, as a character of Zora Neale Hurston says, you have to go there. I have taken it to be my task, in retranslating this classic, not only to make the way straight to go there but to say why go there at all.

I recommend this classic in sociology for reading today, even though the ethnography is outdated, and the outlook upon gender quaint, because it presents the opportunity to encounter a dazzlingly complex soul whose burden of life animates the work. It is this same burden that animates great art. *Formes* has not only the steady brilliance of a classic but also a certain incandescence. It is like a virtuoso performance that is built upon but leaps beyond the technical limits of the artist's discipline, beyond the safe striving merely to hit the correct notes, into a felt reality of elemental truth. To read it is to witness such a performance. The illuminations are public, the performance personal.

Durkheim is usually remembered as the no-nonsense advocate of *science positive*—"positive[27] science"—in the study of social life, as a man who set out to rescue social science from undisciplined subjectivity, from philosophical argument that delicately minuetted with facts or touched them not at all, from parochial sentimentality, and from the naive individualisms of his time. But the argument of *Formes* is markedly personal in both rhetorical style and scientific substance, revealing a man who was far more than the hard-nosed opponent of the second-rate and the sentimental in social science (although

he was that too). We hear the heartbeat of *Formes* in Durkheim's stunning theme throughout: that religious life (*la vie religieuse*) both expresses and constructs the logical life (*la vie logique*) of humankind. We hear it in the audacious claim he makes, ostensibly as a secondary issue but in fact throughout the book, that the elemental categories in which we think—time, space, number, cause, class, person, totality—have their origins in religious life.

It is gripping drama to see how a man of *science positive* could possibly make such claims, how he could go about arguing them in an era when science seemed to be dismembering religion, and most of all, why such a man would ever choose to. This drama is gripping for us still: The dispute between science and religion is at least as loud now as it was in his time. In the book, Durkheim's feet seem at one moment to be on the solid ground of immensely detailed scientific observation and at the next on the high wire of faith. But whose? His Aboriginal Australian subjects'? His contemporaries'? His own? Ours? We keep listening in order to find out which it is, when, in what, and in what capacity. People sleepwalk even in the company of the powerful, if they are uninteresting men and women of shallow dilemmas. Durkheim was an interesting man, because he had the capacity to sustain the manifold internal tension of his own ideas, and because he had a dilemma and a subject capable of earning prolonged attention.

Religion still arouses passionate interest, and passion too. If it is an opium of the oppressed, it is not only the opium that puts people to sleep but also the one that makes legions of people go to great lengths to get their own dose of it. If religion is incompatible with scientific rationality and secular political life, those conflicts are public and active ones, not the passive withering away into self-evident defeat that observers of right and left long imagined. Doom has not followed from religion's demonstrated setbacks in describing nature. Indeed, one cannot describe today's world without the collective identities that religions sustain: quietly worshipping churches in some places, churches militant in others. Religion is the steady, day-in-day-out reality of millions, their routine framework of everyday activity, their calm certainty of life and its steady, but sometimes racing, pulse.

In 1979, we watched as crowds shouting "*Allahu Akbar!*"—"God is great!"—destroyed the Iranian monarchy and consecrated Ruhollah Khomeini as Imam. In 1989, we saw the reconsecration of the People's House of Culture in Vilnius as the Cathedral of Vilnius, the replacement there of St. Casimir's bones after some forty years, and then the dignified filing past of Lithuanians reconstituting themselves as a religiously and ethnically defined nation-state. And who would have thought in 1912 that, three generations later in America, religion would be a hot button political topic, the object of

undignified excitement, the locus of dispute over where the authoritative designation of where right conduct lies and must lie?[28] As a scholar and teacher, I advocate the dignified excitement of studying religion with discipline—and Durkheim's shuttling between *science positive* and the high wire of faith exemplifies a sort of discipline that we can cultivate.

Yet discipline cannot be the whole point. Works of genius ultimately are disrespected by being touted as mere calisthenics for the mind. They are diminished to the extent that, like aids to physical exercise, they become tools fitted to known tasks, captive servants of mental "training" in the school years. The improvisational high-wire mode of the unexpected is lost thereby and, with it, the special work and worth of genius. In the end, *Formes* would not be worth reading again and again if all it did was help us cultivate intellectual discipline in our attempts to understand what we call "religion." In fact it does much more. In this sometimes sober, sometimes high-wire, exploration of what he calls "the religious nature of man," Durkheim carries his readers beyond ordinary ideas about what religion is and does. We meet the man who could say, to the sober assent of believers down the ages, that "the man who has communed with his god . . . *is stronger*"[29] but who could also say, to the boisterous dissent of true believers down the ages, "There are no religions that are false." We meet the man who said both—and in a work of *science positive.*

AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SOUL

Little is known about Durkheim's personal life. I will not repeat the tidbits here but instead refer readers to W. S. F. Pickering's and Steven Lukes's compilations of what is known, and portray the man as we meet him in Book One, Chapter 2, in his mode of virtuoso play—and display. There, in the posture of demolishing mistaken theory, he takes up one of religions' elemental *représentations collectives.* I propose that we make our acquaintance with him by observing how he acquaints us with the great nineteenth-century scholar of religion, Edward Burnett Tylor.

Tylor put forward a very influential theory about the origin of an idea that a great many peoples have developed and variously conceived of as a singular thing (*the* or *a* soul), or yet as a generic substance (soul, period),[30] immortal yet sometimes susceptible to annihilation, attached to persons yet migratory despite such attachments, intimately known yet almost impossible to describe, personal yet transmissible to objects and animals, ethereal yet powerful, and much else, but above all conceived as mysterious, contradictory, and hard to conceive. Introducing us to Tylor, the man of *science positive* introduces us to the idea of soul. In Chapter 8, Durkheim returns to soul at

length, in a hauntingly beautiful construction of how human beings in the full dignity of reason might have come to postulate the idea of soul in order to theorize aspects of the real. In his view, those human beings were not, like St. Augustine, able to "believe precisely because it was absurd." He trained his heavy rhetorical guns against scholars whose logic entailed that they must have been able to do so.

By Durkheim's day, comparative studies on religion had long since revealed that soul, as a concept, is to be found virtually wherever religion is found. The question scholars asked themselves was why such an inherently confusing idea came to be such a widespread idea, even in societies nothing like those of the Australians. The existence of individual souls had to be accommodated even in the society inhabited by Descartes. And everywhere, accommodating their existence led to questions about where they might reside and about their relationship to those residences. Readers who remember their Descartes (who, of course, was at Durkheim's intellectual fingertips and those of his readers) will remember that, via his *Cogito, ergo sum,* the mind/body dualism, hence the soul/body dualism, was rooted in his search for that which cannot be doubted. Bear in mind, too, that Descartes conceived of a mechanics that held for all things that possessed "extension"—but not for God or soul, whose existence in the real included neither extension nor subordination to the laws of mechanics. Speculating about the soul's localization, Descartes postulated that it resides in the (still mysterious) pineal gland.

Durkheim addressed the matter of localization differently. Free from the hot breath of the Inquisition, as Descartes (1596–1650) was not, and freed also by his interpretive use of exotic materials, Durkheim repeated the solutions his Australian subjects gave the same empirical problem—for example, in many rituals, notably those conducted in the midst and aftermath of mourning. The practicalities of ritual doing localized the soul in certain organs and in the blood, which were thereby revealed, in his phrase, as "the soul itself seen from outside"[31] (a formulation that may have suggested to Durkheim's audience certain philosophers of antiquity).[32] The Australians' urge to localize the soul set them beside not only the Catholic Descartes but also the pagan Empedocles[33] and the Jewish writers of Leviticus and Deuteronomy (whom Durkheim cites), all solving it rather more like the Australians than like Descartes. By Tylor's more secularized day, the question was not merely where the soul might be but a more radical one that would surely have provoked the Inquisition into action: why people ever *imagined* any such thing. Tylor held that the idea arose from the universal but individual experience of dreaming. For Tylor, dreaming posed a theoretical problem that nagged nightly at earliest humanity's consciousness until it was solved

with the invention of a double, or a soul. Demolishing this argument was the Durkheim who had already pronounced religious ideas to be grounded in and to express the real. The solution Tylor imputed to "primitives" failed that test.

After reviewing the merits of Tylor's enterprise, Durkheim proceeded to carry out an intellectual death of a thousand cuts. According to Tylor, the idea of the soul, or double, explained ecstasy, catalepsy, apoplexy, and fainting; illnesses and health, good fortune, bad fortune, special abilities, or anything else that departed slightly from the ordinary; and on down an expanding list applied to an expanding population of souls. Thus did an idea of great import for religions everywhere come to explain everything. Thus did the power of souls increase. And thus did Tylor's primitive man, having come up with the concept of soul to solve a merely speculative problem, finally end up as "a captive in this imaginary world, even though he is its creator and model."[34] Here is Durkheim's *coup de grâce:* "Even if the hypothesis of the double could satisfactorily explain all dreaming, and all dreaming could be explained in no other way, one would still have to say why man tried to explain it at all. . . . [H]abit easily puts curiosity to sleep."[35] Indeed, even if curiosity had been awake, dreaming would not by any stretch have posed the most obvious problem: "There was something incomprehensible in the fact that a luminous disc of such small diameter could be adequate to light the Earth—and yet, centuries went by before humanity thought of resolving that contradiction." So, why should humanity, especially Tylor's materially hard-pressed primitive humanity, have invented an idea fundamental to virtually all religions, in order to solve the nighttime puzzle of dreaming, a trivial puzzle by comparison with the one they bypassed in the light of day? Durkheim then moves on to stiletto Herbert Spencer's amendments to Tylor's theory. He ends on his point about the real:

> In the end, religion is only a dream, systematized and lived but without foundation in the real. . . . Indeed, whether, in such conditions, the term "science of religions" can be used without impropriety is questionable. . . . What sort of a science is it whose principal discovery is to make the very object it treats disappear?[36]

Returning in Chapter 8 to treat the idea of soul according to his own principle about the roots of religion in the real, Durkheim gives his argument a striking end and then a still more striking coda. The idea of soul, he concludes, actually was needed to solve a problem that the daytime course of social life forced human reason to confront: the indisputable reality that there

is death, yet communities live on, and there is birth: "In sum, belief in the immortality of souls is the only way man is able to comprehend a fact that cannot fail to attract his attention: the perpetuity of the group's life."[37] Socially, he argued, it stood for that collective life; individualized, it stood for the social part of every human being, the human (as distinct from the animal) part. It is at once a discrete being and an ethereal substance, at once individual par excellence and yet social.[38]

In the coda, Durkheim's evocations of Leibniz and Kant begin far from ethnography, but close to us. Using their ideas, he reminds us that soul, however slippery as a concept, is something humankind has come to know very well from our experience of the real: "The idea of soul long was, and in part still is, the most universally held form of the idea of personality."[39] At the very end, therefore, we arrive at the notion of soul as an utterly indispensable daytime concept by which humankind has expressed a vivid sense of "person" characterized by discreteness and yet by continuity through time. Despite the analytical prickliness for *science positive* of this reality, to call its reality "nonempirical" would be odd.[40] After all, we do not ordinarily have something nonempirical in mind when we think of "person" as a physical body plus something more. At the same time, however, to tackle the soul as an empirical matter is alive with difficulties. Perhaps for this reason, Durkheim's attempt to set study of it into the frame of empirical scholarship has been almost completely ignored. So far as I am aware, the only recent scholarship that puts to use Durkheim's elegant reconstruction of soul on secular terrain of the real is Michel Foucault's, in *Discipline and Punish.*[41]

I suspect that this reconstruction of the soul from the raw material of real experience takes us close to the intuitional sources of Durkheim's work on religion. I suddenly felt those sources nearby me one hot August afternoon as I contended with the chapter on mourning rites (Book Three, Chapter 5), which is full of evidence from Australia about sin, the soul, and the things that happen to or are done about both. At one point, the *Book of Common Prayer* phrase "remission of sin" suddenly came unbidden from depths of the heard but dimly understood formulas of my own churchgoing childhood. It came to me in a flash that Durkheim's mind must have had strata of the same sort. Consider the *Modeh,* a prayer of thanks said from early childhood every morning, even before washing, by means of which Jews thank God for the return of the soul after its departure each night.[42] I suspect that, on an inherently elusive topic like soul, Durkheim's own personal archaeology, available consciously and unconsciously, enabled him to encounter religious notions other than as "a blind man trying to talk about colour." Consider this from Durkheim:

> The soul is not merely distinct from its physical envelope, as the inside is from the outside. . . . [I]t elicits in some degree those feelings that are everywhere reserved for that which is divine. If it is not made into a god, it is seen at least as a spark of the divinity. This fundamental characteristic would be inexplicable if the idea of the soul was no more than a prescientific solution to the problem of dreams. Since there is nothing in dreaming that can awaken religious emotion, the same must be true of the cause that accounts for dreaming. However, if the soul is a bit of divine substance, it represents something within us that is other than ourselves.[43]

Now consider this passage by a Jewish authority of our own day:

> To be sure, the world as a whole may be viewed as a divine manifestation, but the world remains as something else than God, while the soul of man, in its depths, may be considered a part of God. . . . [W]e speak of only an aspect of God, or of a divine spark, as constituting the essence of the inner life of man. . . . Every soul is thus a fragment of the divine light.[44]

Not to belabor a point that cannot be developed here, let me invite further study by noting that Durkheim analyzes Australian notions such as transmigration and an original fund of souls and that the passage just quoted from goes on to talk about *Knesset Israel,* "the pool in which all the souls in the world are contained as a single essence." If Durkheim's personal experience is part of *Formes* in this way and if religion's roots in the real preoccupy him, as I have shown they do, then we must take very seriously his remarks addressed to "free believers" about the injustice of anathematizing *Formes* as "irreligion." To make this point, however, is not to launch a silly search for correspondences between Durkheim's religious upbringing and his theorizing.[45] Rather, just as my own understandings of religion could unpredictably mediate my attempt to understand Durkheim, so too must his own early religious experience have given him an unavoidable—and yet invaluable—door into the subject of this work.

In justifying his methodological choice of studying totemism as a useful lens through which to study religion in general, Durkheim observes that sometimes "nature spontaneously makes simplifications."[46] Analogously, I suggest, Durkheim's own experience provided a "spontaneous simplification" that enabled him to move the topic of religion away from its capacity (or its confused and confusing incapacity) to give an account of the natural world, but instead to explore, and explore profoundly, its capacity to deliver a humanly shaped world to that very world's human shapers. As he says in the Conclusion, "[D]ebates on the topic of religion most often turn around and

about on the question of whether religion can or cannot be reconciled with science. . . . But the believers—the men who, living a religious life, have a direct sense of what religion is made of—object that, in terms of their day-to-day experience, this way of seeing does not ring true. . . . Its true function is to make us act and to help us live."[47]

This once-practicing member of a tightly knit religious community who abandoned religion, but whose scientific work was enriched by the fact that certain core intuitions of religion did not abandon him, knew an off-the-mark theory of religion when he saw one. It is no surprise to find him scornful of writers who think they have undone religion merely by debunking its account of nature. To mix a metaphor, the human Kangaroo clan members we view through his lens had bigger theoretical fish to fry than the kangaroos leaping around them. And so it will not be Durkheim who discovers among the Australians "the thoroughgoing idiocy" that some authors ascribed to "primitives."[48] It will be Durkheim who again and again refutes that discovery, out of those same authors' own evidence.

But for my own chance encounter with a problem of translation, I would not have guessed the complex strata that underlie *Formes.* Most commentators walk back and forth on the ground directly above them. W. S. F. Pickering and Lewis A. Coser at least point out that those layers are down there and are important.[49] But consider Alvin Gouldner's stunning characterization of Durkheim's thought as "*Catholic* organicism."[50] And Aron, in his magisterial comparative portraiture of nineteenth-century masters, paints Durkheim first, ignoring the question of religious background altogether until he arrives at his second portrait, of Max Weber, a great sociologist of religion who, he observes, "belong[ed] to a profoundly religious family (although probably a nonbeliever himself)."[51] But it is Weber who called himself religiously "unmusical," while Durkheim told an audience that he was not blind to religions' color. In general, I found little confirmation for my own sense that Durkheim's religious background mattered in what he said and wrote.[52] Some writers apparently believe that truth can be arrived at from nowhere in particular, or from everywhere at once, and that the person is irrelevant. In the case of testing hypotheses, that view is doubtless correct. In the case of genius, however, it is self-contradictory. Creative genius is by its nature individual, and its sources are quintessentially personal.

INDIVIDUAL MINDS AND YET COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS: SOME KEY ARGUMENTS IN *FORMES*

Ordinarily my task would now be to render an account of Durkheim's intellectual world: the influences he inherited and passed on, the debates he waged with his contemporaries, the understandings he took for granted but that we cannot—in short, a world of texts into which *Formes* fits. There is, of course, such a world, but understanding it can be left for later without immediate loss to understanding the central arguments of *Formes.* One set of questions to be delved into elsewhere would certainly be Durkheim's conversations with Kant, about the problem of knowledge and about moral obligation, which merits a kind of attention that his traditional audience of sociologists and anthropologists has in general not given it; and so does his dialogue with Auguste Comte, a philosopher now remembered by most of us only via two or three canned characterizations—academic sound bites, so to speak.[53] Another would be the book's relation to the versions of psychology that represented the state of the art in Europe at the turn of this century.[54] Finally, there is a whole set of questions that are perennial and that have the same rewards as playing scales: whether *Formes* (like Durkheim's work generally) is or is not ahistorical[55]—and, in connection with that, does or does not belong to the miscellany of theoretical notions that came to be called functionalism.[56] I leave all those questions aside for now.

I note but leave aside controversies about the use Durkheim made of the Australian ethnography available in his time (and, to a lesser extent, Native American and others), on the grounds that even furious and emotional academic debates of the past are not always riveting, or especially enlightening, in the present. This is not to say that the ethnographic details can safely be skipped. As we learn right from the introduction, Durkheim intends that his own route through the Australian ethnography should lead to "man in general"—and "more especially," he says, "present-day man, for there is none other that we have a greater interest in knowing well." Totemism seemed to him a usefully simplifying case that would reveal "the religious nature of man . . . a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity."[57] So although *Formes* displays his grasp of the ethnographies on totemism that were available to him, it is far less an investigation of how or why human beings come to imagine themselves as plants or animals than an investigation of how they come to imagine themselves as human beings. Since the fact jumps off the page that totemic communities must be imagined, their study enables us to

grasp the same fact in relation to our own: To exist at all, all communities must be imagined. What his intellectual descendant Benedict Anderson has so well shown for large-scale twentieth-century anticolonial nationalism is also true of any face-to-face community and of the smallest Australian clan.[58] But clearly, no one today should read *Formes* if he or she is only interested in the religions of Australia.[59]

Finally, I will not repeat here what nearly three generations of critique have by now shown in great detail about where lie the shortcomings of *Formes* and of Durkheim's work more generally. I cannot do better than Steven Lukes's intellectual biography of Durkheim,[60] Robert Nisbet's analysis of his thought in its intellectual context,[61] or W. S. F. Pickering's close study of his sociology of religion,[62] to name only three quite different studies out of a long and often distinguished list. I make no attempt here to review the vast and growing literature. In addition, since I have made it my task to show why the book can still be read with excitement, I bypass many difficulties and legitimate qualifications. Instead, I focus on key bits and pieces of Durkheim's argument that are still immediately provocative, and that move through the world as canned characterizations of the book, part of an intellectual world *about* Durkheim's sociology of religion. After briefly considering the elements of his famous but contested definition of religion, let us turn to three such traditional academic sound bites, each of which has always implied potentially hostile queries: Durkheim's "equation" of religion and society, or God and society,[63] his use of collective concepts, and, foremost among those, his sacred/profane dichotomy.

This world *about* Durkheim contains a good deal of distortion, in part the legacy of Joseph Ward Swain's monumental 1915 translation. Distortions arise not only from inaccuracies in Swain's translating, but also from the challenges of an English text that discourages readers from tackling *Formes* under their own intellectual steam. Its difficult English invites reliance on interpretational clues from various "trots." If we follow the out-of-context bites to their intellectual places in *Formes* itself, however, we gain keys to the book as a whole. Some of the most persistently troublesome of those bites are found in Book Two, Chapter 7. There, the ideas of totemic principle and force are derived as outputs of collective life, that is, as outputs of the mechanisms by which collective life is produced. If those ideas did not exist, they or something quite like them would have to be invented. I will turn to this centrally important chapter of *Formes* after examining Durkheim's manner of defining his overall subject.

Religion Defined

Durkheim defines religion in Book One, Chapter 1:

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.[64]

Bear three points in mind. First, religion is not defined in terms of anything that would turn a man of *science positive* away from observable phenomena, or the real—not divinity, the otherworldly, the miraculous, or the supernatural. Second, the phrase "unified system" postulates that religious beliefs and rites are not hodgepodges but are internally ordered. Third, the objects of those rites and beliefs acquire their religious status as sacred, or "set apart and forbidden," as a result of joint action by people who set them apart and who, by the same stroke, constitute themselves a "moral community" or "a Church." Once again, then, religion is social, social, social. In addition, the "moral" in the term "moral community" specifies that the groups are not hodgepodges either but are made up of individuals who have mutually recognized and recognizable identities that set them, cognitively and normatively, on shared human terrain. Hence, the quality of sacredness exists in the real, and its creation is the observable product of collective doing. Here is one reason that Durkheim found it attractive to handle rites analytically as being prior to beliefs.[65]

This definition foreshadows the organization of *Formes* as a whole. Book Two examines totemic beliefs insofar as they seem to him jointly to constitute a "unified system" of core beliefs; at the same time it associates those beliefs with one kind of moral community, which Durkheim calls "social organization based on clans."[66] Book Three examines those beliefs as they are being collectively *done,* entering the real through the performance of rites. It makes an analytical distinction between two moments of ritual doing that typically occur simultaneously on the ground: differentiation, or doing that creates the sacredness of people or things (negative rites, characterized by setting apart people and things, through the various procedures described), and integration, or doing that takes place amid already sanctified people or things (positive rites, characterized by the bringing together of sanctified things and people, again by various procedures).[67]

The God/Society Equation

Virtually everyone who has encountered *Formes* is stopped dead when Durkheim says, "Is it not that the god and the society are one and the same?" From this passage has fallen the nugget that by "equating" the god with the society, Durkheim "reduces" the god to the society (sometimes revealingly shorthanded as God, capital "G," and society). Many discussions about the interpretation of *Formes* converge here, at his famous "equation." Now, if we go to the actual statement in the actual argument, we recover a fact that is sometimes lost sight of: Durkheim's question in that chapter is how it comes about that rationally constituted Australians ascribe power to totemic beings and indeed to symbolic representations of them. As usual, he seeks to find the basis of that in the real. His problem is not who, what, or how great the god is but how a science of religion can turn its beam of light on the religious object without "making it disappear." The argument surrounding the nugget will clarify:

> [The totem] expresses and symbolizes two different kinds of things. From one point of view, it is the outward and visible form of what I have called the totemic principle or god; and from another, it is also the symbol of a particular society that is called the clan. It is the flag of the clan, the sign by which each clan is distinguished from the others, the visible mark of its distinctiveness, and a mark that is borne by everything that in any way belongs to the clan: men, animals, and things. *Thus if the totem is the symbol of both the god and the society, is this not because the god and the society are one and the same?* How could the emblem of the group have taken the form of that quasi-divinity if the group and the divinity were two distinct realities? Thus the god of the clan, the totemic principle, can be none other than the clan itself, but the clan transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal that serves as totem.[68]

Durkheim's question and his answer have tended to bring out curiously theological anxieties and reticences.

Suppose he had committed a "reduction."[69] Would it mean that some necessary thing is lost? If so, what? For certain believers, the answer obviously is that God, capital "G," is lost (and so is "the god," if we have in mind believers ecumenical enough to battle for the pagan Greeks' Zeus, say, or for those aspects of the emperor of mid-twentieth-century Japanese that went beyond the ordinarily human). But who is God that *secular* social scientists should take note of him?[70] For secular social scientists, or for men and women of *science positive,* religion cannot be altered by subtracting a supernatural being from it. Their methods begin from unbelief (professionally,

not necessarily in terms of personal conviction) in anything that cannot in principle be observed by anyone who uses those methods. Through those methods of observation, people with God look exactly the same as people without God.[71] No supernatural realm or being is available to a (methodologically) unbelieving social scientist, who can claim access only to nature, not to supernature. To a believer, on the other hand, it is unclear that anyone else's supernatural realm is available. So unless sociology must be made consonant with theology, nothing necessary is lost. A reader now wondering whether the integrity of theology is thereby compromised has arrived on the fascinating and ambiguous spiritual territory promised by the quotations from Durkheim with which I began this Introduction. There is no need to resolve the question. To keep it open is to keep pace with an agile guide to this territory.

If, alternatively, we asked what necessary thing must be kept or added, some would argue that not God or gods but *belief* oriented to him or her, or to them, must be included.[72] For Durkheim, however, religion was "a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity," though gods were not a fundamental and permanent aspect of religion. It thus followed that neither gods themselves nor beliefs about gods could be essential. What if we disagreed, insisting that *observed* believing was essential, contending something like this: If gods and the supernatural cannot be observed by scientific means, action oriented to them or presupposing belief in them can be. But if only belief in supernatural beings is the victim, then Durkheim has a powerful reply: Nothing durable is lost, for what is more fleeting or hard to observe than subjective belief? What is more open to derailment, from one moment to the next, whimsically or in the cold light of observable fact (recall those very things whose "resistance" religions "could not have overcome")? And besides, from the standpoint of the social scientist, believers in gods look exactly the same as unbelievers in gods—and exactly the same as people with beliefs in or about other things. The subjective is no handier than the supernatural, and but slightly more accessible. In those terms, we can begin to see the advantage in Durkheim's choice of observing religious ideas (*représentations,* the subject of Book Two) as being (observably) *done* (as *attitudes rituelles,* the subject of Book Three) and, hence, why even his exposition of *the ideas* (Book Two) resorts to slow-motion, set-piece depictions of totemic rites, giving them an almost you-are-there vividness.

As a way out of the predicament of evaporating tools, it might be tempting to accept belief as given, taking up the W. I. Thomases' famous sociological crutch: Whatever is believed in as real is real in its consequences. But to regard belief as a simple given is also to skirt the obvious question of how

people come to treat something as real that to the unbelieving onlooker cannot be. The world of religion is full of improbable things: Christians' Immaculate Conception or their life from death; Aztecs' sunrises caused by human sacrifices; Lithuanians' gaining well-being from the bones of St. Casimir; Australians' black men who are also white cockatoos. And as Durkheim himself points out, deadpan, people look most like relatives and friends, not like plants or animals.[73] "Real in its consequences" quickly wears thin. Which consequences? What reality? If the faithful are thought of as rationally constituted human beings, what would cause them to fly in the face of what they can observe from moment to moment and year after year? And is our understanding advanced if we assume the religious faithful of all ages merely to be people who can be sold the Brooklyn Bridge, not just once but over and over again? Ultimately, then, to leave belief unexamined is to gain a mentally incompetent human.

Hence, once again, Durkheim's point about the real holds importance: A human institution that endures must necessarily be founded on something that anyone, not just those certifiably afflicted with "thoroughgoing idiocy," can accept as being really real—not just "believed in" as real and not just patronized as "believed in." The whole of Book One spectacularly demolishes theories of religion that want to be scientific but whose logic implies that religion's objects are unreal, and its subjects eternally open to being sold the Brooklyn Bridge.[74] How the objects of religion can be real for a secular social scientist is the question Durkheim asks his reader to explore with him. His point is not to diminish God but to lift into view the reality of God worshipped, the reality of the experience of God, and the rationality of those who experience God.

The Chapter 7 academic sound bite just picked apart belongs to an extended argument establishing that "religious forces are real forces," not mere figments of mythic or mystic belief. If we begin again, not at that memorable show-stopping line about the god and the society as being one but in its intellectual context within *Formes,* we need not hop around to avoid treading on the theological and metaphysical feet of social researchers and their subjects. To start, all we have to do is concede that sometimes the objects of religion strain the sense of what is real but do not necessarily lose the adherent for that reason. (Besides, for Durkheim, the very warp and woof of religions is something other than reality "as the senses show it to him."[75] And yet without this human imagining beyond reality as the senses show it, science would be impossible.) Religious conceptions that do strain credulity pose the question Durkheim tries to answer. His religious human is capable of noticing religion's empirical discrepancies. Even if it was true, as LaCapra has (I think, mistakenly) suggested, that Durkheim is on a "Thomist" mission of

reconciling faith with reason, he would be doing so precisely because it is believing that is inherently problematic for the faithful.[76] Doing, on the other hand, is not; hence, yet another route to the priority Durkheim gives to rites over beliefs and its usefulness as a way of thinking about the persistence of beliefs that are nonsensical on their face.[77] But not only that: Since we speak of "Thomism," let us remember that Thomas Aquinas came centuries after Jesus's personal friend Thomas, whom the sophisticated faithful of antiquity passed down the ages as an eternal figment of religious life: doubt.[78] If religion could exist *only* on condition of being believed or even believable, its life would have had numbered days, speedily exhausted.

The line about the god and the society as one and the same can be thought about in yet another way. Consider the religious world into which God, or "the god," sent the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). Note that the first five concern the relationship of humans to God, and the second five, that of humans to one another. Furthermore, the passage contains no invitation to regard either set as having a different or higher status than the other, as being obligatory in a way that the other is not—or, for that matter, as being separately conceived. In terms of that theological world, the conceptions of the god and of the society are inseparable. To say that "the god and the society are one and the same" is not necessarily to say any more than God did, speaking through Moses. It seems to me that *Formes* throughout has that world in view. If the point just made is at all contentious, and I have no doubt it is, then the contentiousness itself gives a point to Durkheim's strategy in choosing an exotic case.

The Case for a Simplifying Case

Let us now notice how Durkheim prepares the tool of using an exotic case to simplify. First, he assumes the Australians to be rationally constituted humans, as are their Parisian contemporaries. There is no question of one's being civilized and the other not, or of the two groups' having different mental constitutions. He presumes the Australians to hold the same title of "man" as Parisians do, and in the same right. "Man is man only because he is civilized," he says.[79] Therefore Australia is as good a place as any other for studying "the religious nature of man," and it has an advantage: Small-scale, stone-tool-using societies were "simple" and thus permitted a degree of clarity and distinctness in thinking that France did not. *Formes* exemplifies a single well-conducted experiment whose results may be put forward as holding for all cases that can be shown to be of the same kind. Furthermore, as Comte

had said, "The simplest phenomena are the most general."[80] Boiled down to its constituent elements, religion in Australia is religion anywhere else. Second, in using ethnography to study religion, Durkheim follows exactly a procedure others had used in attacking religion: taking exotic facts to expose religion universally as delusion, fabrication, and the like. What is delusion and so on in religion among the naked "X's" is also delusion and so on in religion among the well-covered consumers of *haute couture.* But he then stands that procedure on its head, making Australia serve as a simple and, by the same stroke, a tough case for religion's roots in the real. Demonstrating the tough case will carry the easier one: What is true for the turn-of-the-century Australian will then be true for the turn-of-the-century Parisian.[81]

Durkheim uses the same rhetorical tactic in arguing the reality of "religious forces": taking the idea of *mana* or totemic principle as the truly tough case. What is shown to be true of the less credible real will be established for the more credible one. Before showing how this tough case also simplifies, however, I briefly digress, for there is one criticism against Durkheim's use of ethnography that can derail us if bypassed. Durkheim was wrong, it is said, to imagine that the societies and religions of Australia were "simple." Their ideas were as elaborate or sophisticated as anyone else's, and since those ideas were as much subject to historical development and change as anyone else's, he had a mistaken fantasy (shared with others in his time) that Australia's stone-tool users preserved in primitive form what must have existed at the dawn of humanity. Although he did not in fact think that,[82] such criticisms are nevertheless partly valid. Yet simplicity is not only a way of characterizing (or stigmatizing) things but also a way of setting problems with clarity—for example, physicists' calculating gravitational force under the (never true) assumption of a perfect vacuum. Since we easily understand why it is useful to simplify by assuming away the atmosphere, we can easily set aside as irrelevant someone's insistence that it is really there.[83] Similarly, rather than settle for the generous discovery that little about the Australians was simple, we do better to imagine what might have been complicating about the French.[84]

What might Durkheim have thought simplifying about looking as far afield from France as he did to investigate "the religious nature of man"? One answer surely was the uncontrollably vague, half-formulated notions that are characteristic of the familiar. (Think back to my contentious statement about the Ten Commandments.) If the discipline of ethnographic study is to uncover what is familiar in the strange, it is also to uncover what is strange about the familiar. From that angle, things Europeans vaguely "know" about the "power of God" look strange enough to make the exotic

case of *mana* a usefully simplifying place to begin. Why is it, for example, that from within the Judeo-Christian tradition, even for thoroughly secular people, it is somehow less troublesome to speak about "the power of God" and mean a transcendental deity than to use the same phrase in respect to a physical object? To borrow Parsons's phrase again, both deity and *mana* should probably be classified together, as "nonempirical reality." Yet somehow, for no logical reason, it *feels* like a different matter to speak of a transcendent deity than to speak of *mana,* the totemic principle, or someplace in the real where objects speak with lips of wood and smite from painted pedestals (and inversely, where lips and smiting hands of flesh are alleged to be only human in appearance but superhuman in essence).

Think of how we read the encounter between the ancient Israelites and their enemies, the people of Ashdod, who built a towering god with feet of clay. That phrase "feet of clay" contains in itself, and takes as given, a complicated and complicating discourse about obviously misplaced (as opposed to well-placed) faith. And consider this: It is a transcendent God whose existence a long tradition in Western philosophy attempts to prove rationally, while living with the culturally given safety net that the failure of proof need not impose the conclusion that that God does not in fact exist.[85] If I am right about what we "know" culturally about the "power of God," even the most secular among us, in contrast to the ideas Durkheim explores (*mana, kwoth, orenda,* etc.), I have just turned up the volume of our own half-heard cultural Muzak, as it were, of an especially troublesome case for the real. Why should this be so? For the same reason that an "equation" of society and God should be troublesome for social scientists supposedly operating nontheologically. A moral equivalent to the material perfect vacuum was called for.

Conscience Collective

Mana, Durkheim says, is the "quasi-divine principle" immanent in things that gives power to certain plants or animals, *and to representations of them.* Before tackling it, he reminds his reader (in the last paragraph of the preceding chapter) that Comte, in calling the idea of force metaphysical, and metaphysics the direct descendant of theology, had already implied that the idea of force began in religion, from which it was borrowed first by philosophy and later by science. But Comte mistakenly concluded that, because of this ancestry, the idea of force had no objective counterpart in reality and thus would eventually disappear from science. To the contrary, however, the concept of force was alive and well in the modern science of Durkheim's day. In fact, the English term "vector" (which appeared in English in 1867) en-

tered French (*vecteur*) in 1899, and Durkheim used the term "resultant" (a vector sum) to mean a social sum of individual forces. Therefore, in contrast to Comte, Durkheim "will show . . . that religious forces are real, no matter how imperfect the symbols with whose help they were conceived of. From this it will follow that the same is true for the concept of force in general."[86]

The reality of religious forces is to be found in the real experience of social life, according to Durkheim. Just as, in the case of soul, psychology sought a physical basis for what humankind had long since discovered in social life, so too force. Contrary to what Comte anticipated, by the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of force had completed its transit from religion, to metaphysics, to *science positive.* To appreciate Durkheim's context, note that cutting-edge work on the fundamental forces was being done no farther away than the laboratories of Marie and Pierre Curie. From 1906 on, Mme. Curie continued her work on radioactivity as a professor at the Sorbonne. Durkheim's account of rites is meant to seize the *idea* of force at its "birth," as he says. He found the birth of that idea in rites, at moments of collective *effervescence,* when human beings feel themselves transformed, and are in fact transformed, through ritual doing. A force experienced as external to each individual is the agent of that transformation, but the force itself is created by the fact of assembling and temporarily living a collective life that transports individuals beyond themselves. Those moments he conveys in a set piece drawn from ethnographic description.

Durkheim's set piece opens with the practical occupations of life suspended, the validity of ordinary rules adjourned, people dressed and painted to resemble one another and the animal or plant by which they name their shared identity, the objects around them "uniformed" in the same way, the whole taking place under a night sky, the scene dotted with firelight, and frenzy—a collective *effervescence.* Swept away, the participants experience a force external to them, which seems to be moving them, and by which their very nature is transformed. They experience themselves as grander than at ordinary times; they do things they would not do at other times; they feel, and at that moment really are, joined with each other and with the totemic being. They come to experience themselves as sharing one and the same essence—with the totemic animal, with its representation, and with each other. In addition, since a symbolic representation of the totemic being stands at the center of things, the real power generated in the assembly comes to be thought of as residing in the totemic object itself. Symbols of the totemic object extend the effects of the *effervescence* into life after the assembly is dispersed. Seen on objects, and sometimes on bodies, totemic representations of various kinds will fill the role of what would be called today a secondary stimulus—a reminder that reactivates

the initial feelings, although more dimly.[87] Since the transformation cannot be done once and for all and fades despite the symbolic reminders, it must periodically be redone—hence, the cyclically repetitive performance of rites.

Through real experience, then, the participants come to ascribe power to sacred objects, that power having nothing to do with the physical characteristics of those objects. It is also through real experience that they arrive at the concept of force, but the real experience they have is that of human beings assembled—or to use Durkheim's abstract formulation, that of society's "concentrating" or "pulling itself together" and thus becoming a unity in the real. This depiction will no doubt seem contrived and mechanical at first glance and on that account may tempt discounting, until the historical memory it activates in us brings us to similar events that we ourselves know operated mechanically—uniformed, firelit, nighttime *effervescences* of the Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan, with individuals led to impute to themselves shared inborn essences and fabulous collective identities,[88] with symbolic reminders shaping everyday life afterward, and with individual doubt in large part not requiring physical violence to be overcome. The mechanism itself is neither good nor evil. If Durkheim is right that it is universal, then we should expect to find it, and do find it, from tattooed street gangs to the Salvation Army, from the habits of the convent to those of the exclusive club.

In all cases an outcome of joint doing, the real that comes into being in the rite, as Durkheim describes it, is independent of (but not necessarily exclusive of) individual belief. The power felt is real, and is felt not only in the physical being of humankind but also in its mental being—humankind's *conscience collective,* that is, in both "conscience" and "consciousness." Besides, its reality can be dramatically transforming. During the exaltation of the French Revolution, for example, "[w]e see the most mediocre or harmless bourgeois transformed . . . into a hero or an executioner."[89] In undramatic times, it is undramatically transforming, as Durkheim says a few sentences later:

> There is virtually no instant of our lives in which a certain rush of energy fails to come to us from outside ourselves. In all kinds of acts that express the understanding, esteem, and affection of his neighbor, there is a lift that the man who does his duty feels, usually without being aware of it.[90]

What creates the transformation is a product of thought, but thought that cannot be accommodated by our usual vocabulary of mere individuals' thinking. It exists only in the mind; but if it exists in only one mind, it does not belong to what can be experienced *by any and everyone* as the real. We arrive by this route at Durkheim's superficially troublesome term *pensée collec-*

tive, "collective thought." It is in collective thought, built into the experience of social life, that the idea of a divinity to which human beings are subordinate gains its foothold in the real.

Yet—and this is a big "yet"—far from erasing the thought of individuals, collective thought is found nowhere else. Throughout Chapter 7 and indeed the whole of *Formes,* we find statements such as this, periodically inserted with teacherly repetition:

> [B]ecause society can exist only in and by means of individual minds, it must enter into us and become organized within us. That force thus becomes an integral part of our being and, by the same stroke, uplifts it and brings it to maturity.[91]

> [L]ike any other society, the clan can only live in and by means of the individual consciousnesses of which it is made. Thus, insofar as religious force is conceived of as embodied in the totemic emblem, it seems to be external to individuals and endowed with a kind of transcendence; and yet from another standpoint, and like the clan it symbolizes, it can be made real only within and by them."[92]

Durkheim has not postulated some outside mind hovering in the human midst. He is striving conceptually to represent aspects of the real that are readily observable but that cannot possibly be *there* to observe or represent at all, if the lone individual is our conceptual unit. To see those aspects of the real, let us turn now to sacredness, an extraordinary quality that ordinary objects acquire only within moral communities. Sacredness is eminently a *représentation collective,* eminently a feature of *pensée* and *conscience collectives.* As a quality of things—or, rather, as Durkheim insists, a quality superadded to things—sacredness can come to be its real self only within the domain of collective consciousness (that is, in the domain of conscience *and* of consciousness). Sacredness is an aspect of the real that exists only in the mind but cannot possibly exist as the real in only one mind.[93]

The Sacred/Profane Dichotomy

Over the years, it has proved easy to make heavier weather than need be of both *le sacré* and *la conscience collective.* W. E. H. Stanner's careful and respectful article on *Formes* called the sacred/profane dichotomy "unusable except at the cost of undue interference with the facts of observation."[94] Try as he might in his fieldwork, he said, he could not find it. If there is in fact nothing about the idea that connects us with our own sense of the real in a way

that illuminates it, then Durkheim would rightly be patronized as the writer of a classic freighted with intractable concepts, to be suffered through and forgotten. But this classic suggests more interesting mental activity than the exercise involved in logically dissecting the term "sacred" itself. In any case, Lukes has already shown in detail its logical rough surfaces.[95] The sacred points to aspects of the real that were doubtless amazing to Durkheim, and that are still there in the social world to amaze us.

Consider first the biblical example of the Holy Ark. Reading at Exodus 25, we see it being made to exact specifications (two carved cherubim on top, the tablets inside, etc.), using materials collected from the community and manufactured in full view of all those present (and subsequently, all readers of the Bible). Thousands of years and miles from that biblical scene, we find very powerful sacred objects called *churingas* in the same state: "[E]ven among the Arunta, there are churingas that are made by the elders of the group, with the full knowledge of and in full view of everyone."[96] Whatever is added to make those objects' sacredness is, like soul, real but without extension. Jewish tradition wonderfully presents that feature by saying of the Ark that even though its dimensions were known, it "miraculously occupied no space in the Holy of Holies."[97] The real, yet nonphysical, characteristic we can observe in both cases cannot be the feature, or the creature, of an individual mind. In both cases, the physical characteristics of the things cannot possibly disclose what they are in the real. In Durkheim's words, "The sensations that the physical world evokes in us cannot, by definition, contain anything that goes beyond that world. From something tangible one can only make something tangible; from extended substance one cannot make unextended substance."[98]

At the same time, both objects' nonphysical reality is available to the individual mind only as it participates in mind both inside and outside itself. And because sacredness originates as it does, it is inherently impermanent and so must be added to the object again and again, just as it was originally: by collective human doing. Equally, because sacredness originates as it does, there necessarily is no unifying characteristic that is shared by everything designated as *sacré,* no all-purpose key to preordain the outcome of fieldwork. "Things so disparate cannot form a class [the sacred] unless a class can be marked by a property, its absence, and its contrary,"[99] Stanner wrote. By thinking in such terms, he created for himself the un-Durkheimian nightmare I will now indicate by moving from the Ark to other examples: Ayatollah Khomeini, the bones of St. Casimir, the louse, and Mt. Sinai.

Remember the tumultuous arrival in 1979 of Ruhollah Khomeini at Tehran airport, with a million people crowding to welcome him. During the evening news, the effervescence of that moment could be felt worldwide re-

gardless of language and in every household of secularized America. Despite the haze of TV distance, the vocal flatness of TV correspondents, dissonant shouting in a language most Americans do not understand, and ritual gestures specific to the moral community Khomeini shared with the crowd, every viewer witnessed the elevation of Khomeini to sacredness. Before our eyes, Khomeini became something other than what he had been as he left Paris only hours before. That Khomeini's elevation was attached to a particular moral community was evidenced straightaway. He had put on sacredness *there,* but not everywhere—a moral distance marked in America by continuing to call "Ayatollah" a man who had gained, *there,* a higher title, "Imam," by acclamation. What was done could only have been done within a group of assembled faithful and could not be undone by individual doubt or unbelief. It was the real to anyone going to Iran then, no matter where they were coming from. Like the Ark, Khomeini's human measurements were known and the same as before; the beard, the turban, and the robes looked exactly as before, but the man was not the same as before. What was added belonged to the real, but it took up no space.

We have also witnessed the inverse process, in which the other crucial term, moral community, is created. In 1989, leaders of a newly independent territory of Lithuania returned relics said to be the bones of St. Casimir to the People's House of Culture, which they reconstituted and reconsecrated as the Cathedral of Vilnius. Lithuanians filed through the new cathedral and past the bones, participants in the birth of a nation. In this example, the sanctification preceded, and was a tool in, the construction of a new moral community, now added to (or superadded to) the already existing physical territory, population, and apparatus of statehood. To the possible objection that such community "always existed," the answer we find in the doing is the late-twentieth-century revival of old bones; the answer we find in *Formes* is that nothing that must be imagined "always exists," but must be continually re-imagined through human doing. This is just as true of moral community as it is of sacred objects. By the selfsame process, those dry bones were made to live again as the sacred objects they once had been.[100] They were resurrected in postcommunist Lithuania and rehabilitated from their lowly state for forty years as the dusty trove of the reactionary and the superstitious. The known physical characteristics and population of Lithuania were the same as before, but the moral community was not. What was added was objectively real, but it took up no space. Imagine the confusion many Americans would feel if asked to pay their respects to the bones.

Sacredness is not a quality inherent in certain objects, nor is it available to the unaided senses of just any individual human observer. It is a quality

that objects acquire when they are, in the phrase from Durkheim's definition, "set apart and forbidden." They are made sacred by groups of people who set them apart and keep them bounded by specific actions; they remain sacred only so long as groups continue to do this. Humans acting collectively make and remake this quality of sacredness but then encounter it after the fact as if it had always been built into objects and was ready-made. In the religious vocabulary used within communities of faith, those things that have been sanctified, "set apart and forbidden," are intrinsically "holy"—and have always been. In the technical vocabulary developed in *Formes,* they are "sacred"—but made so by doing.[101] The same process can make a man or woman, a piece of cloth, a lizard, a tree, an idea or principle (anything, including excrement, which Durkheim slides into a footnote) into a sacred thing and the mandatory recipient of elaborated deference. Durkheim makes this point over and over again, hammering it home one last time in Book Three, Chapter 2. There we come upon ritual celebrations that center on, of all things, the louse.

Sacredness is not merely a set of peculiar relationships between people and certain designated objects. The very act that constitutes those peculiar relationships also relates a designated group of people to one another and sets them apart from others to whom they are not bound and who do not have the same relationship to designated physical objects. Turn the Thomases' formula around: Whatever is obviously real, given its obviously real consequences, tends to be accepted as real. Whatever power they acquire, and it can be quite considerable, is real power. Notice that there is no question of debunking native beliefs about that power as imaginary. To do so would be the same as saying that social life itself is merely imaginary and society itself changeable merely by an impulse to change one's mind. So far as sacred objects are concerned, the question is how to describe and explicate the nature of that power, which Durkheim posits as real.

"Power" in what sense and "real" in what sense may be observed in the following passage from Exodus (19), when Mount Sinaï evolves by a set of human actions into a place where the power of God may "break forth upon" the people and destroy them:

> And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes. . . . And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death. There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall

> not live. . . . And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. (Exodus 19:10, 12, 13)

Remember by what agency transgressors would be "stoned" or "shot through." As the people did their part, the mountain did its own, and by the "third day" of God's instructions to Moses, it had become enveloped in smoke and it quaked.

> And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. . . . And Moses said unto the Lord, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount and sanctify it. (Exodus 19:21, 23)

Notice that the biblical text explains natural power in natural terms (whoever violates the sacredness of the mountain will be "stoned," "shot through," or "surely put to death") but that the power of the mountain is not thereby explained away. The Bible writers presumably could see what we do in what they themselves wrote quite matter-of-factly yet without diminishing the real power of their God. It came to be the case that whoever went up into the mountain, apart from Moses and Aaron, would surely die. I think this is what Durkheim found remarkable about the natural means by which sacred objects move above and beyond—*really* above and *really* beyond—their natural ordinariness and about how the people who exert those natural means thereafter move in and out of awareness of how what was done was done. In other words, "Man makes God," as Marx wrote, but not in any way he pleases.

An object such as that mountain moves above and beyond its natural ordinariness in this way only within the ambit of a *conscience collective*—collective conscience normatively, in conduct, and collective consciousness cognitively, in thought. The two are not separate. *Conscience collective* is the achievement of mind that transfigures *the* real world and makes it *a* shared world that is in fact *the* real world as known and knowable by some group, some moral community. It would not be obvious to an ignorant foreign passerby how Mount Sinai was different from other mountains. He might well climb it with his shoes on, travel its slopes at will, and, caught in this profanation, might be "shot through." Readers may recognize this ignorant passerby as the sort favored by old-fashioned movies of colonization, in which the colonial officer in his pith helmet and shorts steps on the sacred spot or shoots the sacred animal for a drawing-room trophy, and to whom knowledge about the real power of the ordinary-seeming object arrives si-

multaneously with a real native rising, unwittingly detonated. The commonsense approach that would be satisfied with thinking about the power of the spot or the animal as merely imaginary, merely an amazing figment of superstition ablaze in each individual native mind but in no colonialist's, seems an unnecessarily roundabout route to grasping the *real* events that follow.[102]

Some years ago, as I was teaching *Formes* to an especially responsive group, my students demanded that we see as a class Stephen Spielberg's (and Harrison Ford's) first-rate adventure movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark.* The story turns on ignorant passersby, good guys and bad guys, engaged in archaeological excavation in a race to acquire the power of the Ark as a kind of ultimate weapon. With a sophistication that thrilled their teacher, my students pronounced judgment on *Raiders*'s ark: The real Ark was a far more interesting object than the fantasy one because it had a complex human nature. The Ark's power inhered in its sacredness, and its sacredness was a feature of its collective life. But what is true of sacred objects is also true of the transcendent beings that communicate with humankind. Strip away the collectivity that makes sacredness real, and you are left with what individuals can manage, acting alone: Freud's patients with the oddball reverences for animals that occasioned their going to the doctor,[103] the bag lady out of whose mouth Jehovah God speaks incessantly in the unknown tongue, the innocuous bourgeois who secretes living and dead things in a hideous private shrine. Strip away sacredness as a feature of that maddening Durkheimian reality *pensée collective,* and you have not a collectively knowable world at all but a whole set of problems about how this or that person could leap to believing this or that strange thing. Your hands are tied to do anything other than suspend disbelief about the ontological claims for whatever it is, incant the formula about things believed in as real as real in their consequences, humor the believer, or just believe the claims.

The real Ark was what it was by virtue of what Durkheim calls "moral" or "ideal" forces, that is, collective human forces. Depending on its life within some given collectivity, anything can become the container of such forces, not just a wooden box made in a certain way. But like the fantasizers of the movie, some theorists have imagined the process to be otherwise, beginning somehow in the inherent grandeur of the object (the naturists' mistake) or in the inherent confusion of the believer's mind (the animists' mistake). Anyone who thinks either way will miss Durkheim's point that the same human capacities that make society possible make what Durkheim calls *la vie religieuse* inevitable. The truth of the mind is in the fictions[104] that, via *conscience collective,* construct the real. If there is ever to be a general theory of the mind that can be reduced to specific capacities of the brain, or an "artificial intelligence" whose discriminations and combinations have anything like the

complexity of what we observe in even commonplace acts and facts of human life, then the theory of the brain's perceptual capacity must include things like the *collective* representation that makes it possible for a man, a mountain, a box of bones, or a louse to be perceived as themselves one moment and as themselves-plus, the next.

Religious Life in Seemingly Nonreligious Life

Durkheim sums up what makes *la vie religieuse* inevitable:

> [I]n all its aspects and at every moment of its history, social life is only possible thanks to a vast symbolism. The physical emblems and figurative representations with which I have been especially concerned in the present study are one form of it, but there are a good many others."[105]

With that summing up, he suggests that we could apply the same analysis in domains remote from anything we could call "religious"—politics certainly, from which Durkheim draws some of his own examples, and status orders of various kinds (think of the notion "blueblood," a racialized shorthand for the "set apart and forbidden" qualities of West European aristocrats, and white bones for those of Russia, as opposed to the black bones of Russian serfs).[106] All such phenomena seem the more outlandish, and the more distinct from reason, the further they seem to be from our own experience of the real. But the burden of Durkheim's argument is that they are not to be separated from human reason, in full operation—hence, from us. Toward the end of Chapter 7, he uncovers the roots of scientific abstraction in the same processes of abstraction that make collective identities possible. Therefore, it is no more remarkable that a man should in totemic observances manage to affirm his kinship with a white cockatoo (despite physical dissimilarities) than that he should manage to affirm his kinship with men and women of the White Cockatoo clan (for, again, it is physical dissimilarities that must be overcome). Both involve abstraction, by which invisible qualities are *added to* what is visible, for there is no other route to unifying the discrete individualities that our sensory experience gives us. That the manner in which this is done may be crude is beside the point:

> The great service that religions have rendered to thought is to have constructed a first representation of what the relations of kinship between things might be. Given the conditions in which it was tried, that enterprise could obviously lead only to makeshift results. But then, are the results of any such

> enterprise ever definitive, and must it not be taken up again and again? Furthermore, it was less important to succeed than to dare. What was essential was not to let the mind be dominated by what appears to the senses, but instead to teach the mind to dominate it and to join together what the senses put asunder. As soon as man became aware that internal connections exist between things, science and philosophy became possible.[107]

That which makes *la vie religieuse* inevitable also links our ways of knowing community and identity with our ways of knowing the natural world. Soul was needed to account theoretically for aspects of our human experience, and empirical needs localized it in selected parts of natural bodies. The experience of force arose first in human relations, but it was found again in nature, in relations among things. By so doing, Durkheim says, humankind made room for nature in society, imagining it on the model provided by schemes for ordering collective life. But by the same stroke, the way nature's order was imagined in turn became consequential for human order. Like the Australians, all human beings acquire *a* world of nature, as if it was *the* world of nature, knowledge of which is mediated by relations with human contemporaries. Although that real world varies from place to place and from one historical epoch to another, the fact that it is consequential for the way humans live in common does not vary.

Thinking through what those connections still mean is one of the intellectual demands that Durkheim's expedition in *Formes* leads us to confront. It is not true that science is consequential only for those who do science. Early in this century, the Russian philosopher Lev Shestov contrasted the way a child learned that ghosts do not exist but at the same time was "given reliable information, the implausibility of which surpasses absolutely every fib ever told . . . that the earth is not motionless, as the evidence indicates, that the Sun does not revolve around the Earth, that the sky is not a solid, that the horizon is only an optical illusion and so on."[108] Once that child's view was *the* world of nature, as adult human beings knew it. That knowledge, in turn, was consequential for their relations to one another. For the kind of reason that *Formes* draws attention to, it was obvious straightaway that Copernicus's discovery affected not only ideas of the relationships heavenly bodies have to one another but ideas of relationships among earthly, human bodies, a connection that the Inquisition did not fail to notice. Cosmology was not imagined in isolation from morality. Not then, but also not now: Our own recent debates in America today over creation science and evolution turn on questions of how citizens should be taught morally (and legally) to regard and relate to one another. Creationism dresses itself in the forms of scientific discourse, if not their spirit; evolutionism sheds the open-endedness of scientific discourse and reclothes

itself as hard nuggets of constitutionally correct scientific content for schoolchildren's *unexperimental* consumption. The heat on both sides points to the dual aspect of *conscience collective*—normative and cognitive—to which Durkheim's intellectually demanding expedition takes us.

That expedition is morally demanding as well, if we reflect on further implications of its discoveries. The passage I just quoted seems to ennoble religion as the source of quintessentially human achievements. But like every other human achievement, its mechanism can turn in more than one way. If Durkheim's analysis is right, it suggests that this century's monstrosities in collective life arise not from aberrations in human reason but from what is fundamental to it. That analysis also leads to a disturbing suggestion: that the ordinary human agents who serve as raw material for extraordinary abusers of human dignity are, in vast majority, the normal and the socially responsible—not deviants, sociopaths, or the crazy. It suggests, finally, that the human nature on which we depend, our social nature, is our uplift and our downfall. The only exit from this dilemma appears to be individualism. But the incompatibility of individualist assumptions with human nature *as it can be observed in the real world* was chief among Durkheim's discoveries in *Formes* and throughout his work. What we see, through his theoretical lens of *conscience collective,* is present in a social world of the real that cannot be arrived at with notions of individual *conscience,* alone. We see that Socrates' individualistic preference for the cup of hemlock over intellectual conformity has appealed down the ages precisely because, in that respect, he was not human in the sense we can observe day in and day out—in social life as empirically available to us. There, we see individual doubt, inherently present, and we see how doubt is overcome. Thus, in the end, there is a deep and tragic tension in Durkheim's discoveries.

FORMES IN FRENCH AND IN ENGLISH

A new translation need not be the occasion to deny the merit of an old one. Joseph Ward Swain gave *Formes* monumental life in English to generations of scholars, and that life in English has been richly productive. No one with a full understanding of what translating *Formes* demands even now should do anything but salute Dr. Swain's achievement. I re-do that work now with the benefit of the use I have made of the book, in English and in French. That use itself has benefited from almost ninety years of critique, the availability of specialized readings and field applications by some of the great anthropologists (Claude Lévi-Strauss, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, and Bronislaw Malinowski, to name only three), various English translations of Durkheim's other work, and good partial retranslations of *Formes* itself. These are aids that Swain did not have. Although

my main purposes are both to re-present *Formes* in idiomatic English and correct Swain's inaccuracies, I differ with Swain without immodesty. The accuracy of many passages cannot be improved upon. Indeed, the very alienness of Swain's English, to our ears, is in a sense faithful to Durkheim, whose ideas are not idiomatic to English speakers—and ultimately, of course, there is no substitute for reading a work in its native language. Whatever its aims, translation requires scholarly, interpretive, and stylistic judgments at many levels.

Readable English has been my goal throughout. To this end, I have chosen resonant English equivalents whenever I could—for example, "outward and visible" for *externel et visible,* and "neighbor" for *semblable,* in cases where religious resonance seems important. (Compare "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.") To the same end, I have replaced French with English word order, dividing or moving Durkheim's frequent parenthetical insertions accordingly, and I have not hesitated to change the punctuation and division into paragraphs, if such changes seemed to me to improve the text's clarity in English or its accessibility to a well-educated reader. I have, in addition, repeated the subject in those new, shortened, sentences—grammatical gender and verb endings are not signposts in English for what goes with what. Furthermore, I have done whatever I had to in the service of good English style, avoiding double genitives and multiple uses of "it" with multiple antecedents (besetting sins in the older work).

In the service of future scholarly work, I have also checked, supplemented, and in some instances corrected as many of the original footnotes as I could, abbreviating the journal titles differently than Durkheim did and bracketing the new information in Durkheim's footnotes. In many cases, I did not change those very short paragraphs, sometimes only a sentence long, that Durkheim used more or less as section headings. Where I did make changes in structure, they are not marked, to avoid riddling the text. In any case, we still have Joseph Ward Swain's text, which makes few concessions to readable English and can serve as a rough-and-ready check for readers who do not wish to tackle the French. In their high-quality partial retranslation of *Formes,* Pickering and Redding deliberately keep the original structure.[109] I have decided differently. My own aim, besides accuracy, is removal of structural and stylistic impediments to encountering the book as the exciting read that I consider it to be.

A sample passage will illustrate my changes. In the Introduction, Durkheim draws an analogy to make his point about studying the simplest case available, in order to uncover the fundamental sources of religious life. His own enterprise is like that of a doctor seeking to uncover the cause of a delu-

sion. The French passage seems reminiscent of Freud; Swain's English passage does not; mine recovers the resemblance to Freud. Here is Swain's passage:

> In order to understand a hallucination perfectly, and give it its most appropriate treatment, a physician must know its original point of departure. Now this event is proportionately easier to find if he can observe it near its beginnings. The longer the disease is allowed to develop, the more it evades observation [*au contraire, plus on laisse à la maladie le temps de se développer, plus il se dérobe à l'observation*]; that is because all sorts of interpretations have intervened as it advanced, which tend to force the original state into the background [*qui tendent a refouler dans l'inconscient l'état originel*], and across which it is sometimes difficult to find the initial one.[110]

Now consider the same passage as it appears in the new translation:

> To understand a delusion properly and to be able to apply the most appropriate treatment, the doctor needs to know what its point of departure was. That event is more easily detected the nearer to its beginning the delusion can be observed. Conversely, the longer the sickness is left to develop, the more that original point of departure slips out of view. This is so because all sorts of interpretations have intervened along the way, and the tendency of those interpretations is to repress the original state into the unconscious and to replace it with other states through which the original one is sometimes not easy to detect.

It is the point of departure of an illness (not the illness itself) that is screened from view. That, plus the terms "repress" and "unconscious," instead of "force" and "background," allow the new passage to sound reminiscent of Freud. I probably have not uncovered a missing link between Durkheim and Freud; Steven Lukes's exhaustive research turned up "no evidence" that Durkheim knew of Freud's work.[111] On the other hand, there is good reason to think Durkheim knew of the celebrated work being done in the 1880s at the Hôpital Salpêtrière in Paris by Jean-Martin Charcot, Freud's predecessor in the study of hysteria, and of the huge controversy about that work in the mid-1890s.[112] So for now, we can be tantalized. Present in the passage is the notion that today we term "screen memories," which is generally credited to Freud, not Charcot.[113] The plot thickens when we realize that Freud certainly knew of and cited Durkheim's work (including *Formes*) in his 1912 paper, "The Return of Totemism in Childhood."[114] In this way, correcting Swain's inaccuracies can add nuance to a scholarly question.

My goal, though, was not merely to correct Swain's work. I tackled the French originals[115] with an eye to the difficulties I have wrestled with and to the characteristic problems I have found in teaching this work to American students. For those reasons, I did not settle for merely literal renderings. If a literal translation conveyed nothing definite in English, I sought a clearer alternative. Of course, the search for expressive equivalents has its limits. Regarding the phrase *solution de continuité,* my colleague Andrée Douchin told me, "Let's face it. That phrase goes back to 1314."[116] She meant there are things about that phrase, literally "dissolution of continuity," that cannot be naturalized. Try naturalizing this illustration from the *Petit Robert,* quoting Victor Hugo, "Between present and future, there is *solution de continuité.*" Hence, although the translator's responsibility is to move Durkheim's text linguistically toward the reader, part of the reader's own responsibility is to move intellectually toward Durkheim.[117] Still, it does not follow that the English itself must sound alien. Literal equivalents of the words and most of the syntax are to be found in Swain. But as I have just shown, literalness is no guarantee against all mistakes.

Moreover, to be literal is not necessarily to be faithful. Durkheim's language was precise and scholarly, to be sure, but his text reads well in French. As a rule, his sentences do not force a calisthenics of decipherment upon the reader. Nor do they assail the reader's ear with ugly rhythms, rhymes, and assonances or with images that clash. I have tried not to let *Formes* read less well in English than it does in French. I have also tried as much as possible to render a feature of Durkheim's personal style that can be lost in translation that is not literal enough: the metaphorical content in his word choices. Durkheim, the workmanlike scientist, deliberately avoided literary flights in scientific writing, but he sometimes thought in poetic ways. His word choices push a whole world of images into the text, and I have tried to keep that world in the new English *Formes.* Durkheim's images give us insight into his mode of thinking and thus into some of the intuitive leaps that mobilized his work. Still, the notes in the mind of the creative genius are not available to be played by his interpreter. Even when the translator's search for equivalents is well informed and resolute, the results stand at a distance from the original text.

Every translation is a reconstruction. Many words and turns of phrase have no exact equivalents between one language and another. Often the same is true even of words that move bodily. Consider the French words *opinion* and *attitude.* Durkheim's *opinion* could have been rendered as "public opinion," if that term had not come to mean discrete bits of mental material to be drawn from individual minds by pollsters and measured as to their frequency

of occurrence. That meaning of "public opinion" carries us to the diametrical opposite of what Durkheim meant by *représentation collective.*[118] In a similar vein, it is now hard to extract "attitude" from the mind—the senses of "doing" or "conduct" are no longer on its surface. To dramatize the French term, as well as an older English sense, consider the *painted* attitudes of Jesus's disciples in *The Last Supper.* Now consider "virtue," which no longer has some of the meanings that are present in Durkheim's *vertu.* Just as, in the King James Bible, the salt can lose its savor, so a medicine or magical object could lose its virtue (or virtues), meaning its material potency, as well as the moral meaning evident in the phrase "a man of virtue," or the curiously different one if we shift gender. In the text, *vertu* goes with other words, *efficace* and *efficacité,* whose English equivalents are oldish but whose more modern-sounding equivalents seem out of place. Hence: The *potency* of the chemical called fluoxetine hydrochloride makes Prozac *effective,* but the *virtues* in blood sprinkled on the sacred rock make the *Intichiuma* rites *efficacious.*

In some instances, Durkheim's meaning and our own everyday one intersect but then diverge so far that our own familiar word becomes strange to us. One such word is "moral." In *Formes, moral* is often synonymous with "social," very nearly the inverse of what we usually mean by "moral."[119] Its most important antonym is not "immoral," as we might think, but "material," "tangible," and "physical." Consequently, "moral" is real but not material. "Good" is often not its synonym; together with "social," "spiritual" and "mental" often are. "Individual" stands with the antonyms of "moral," because Durkheim's "individual" denotes the body, its drives and appetites, its sensory apparatus—in short, our bodily being considered as distinct from our human being. The "social" is the source from which comes the humanizing discipline of the "individual" that creates the "person." Hence, the following distinction between "individual" and "person": "Our sensations are in their essence individual. But the more emancipated we are from the senses, and the more capable we are of thinking and acting conceptually, the more we are persons."[120]

Not only is "moral" not necessarily "good"; it is often not even on the same terrain as abstract judgments of "good" and "bad." For Durkheim, those judgments can be made only in particular social settings.[121] What is "moral" is "social"; both vary with time and place. Accordingly, the domain of the "moral" is not private, with its origin in some mysterious somewhere in the depths of the physical individual, as our commonsense usage suggests. Clearly, by that point, we are on ground quite alien to our own. On Durkheim's ground, there can be no full-fledged person standing apart from the "moral," as instituted in some historically given social setting. Thus, whereas

in our own habitual way of thinking, that which is best in us stands apart from the social, in Durkheim's it is that, precisely, which is at war with our humanity.[122] For Durkheim, what stands apart is a being that is no more than the body, and all that the body tows along with it: The brain is there but not what we recognize as thinking; movement is there but not what we recognize as human doing. The mere co-presence of many such bodies is just that, a mere co-presence, as lacking in mutually recognizable identity as so many potatoes in a sack. With nothing but the merely physical and material collection of "individuals," there is neither reason nor identity nor community. There is no language and no kinship; there are age differences but no generations; there are sex differences but no genders.

Unlike *morale,* which can broaden along with its place in a distinctive system of thought, the term *culte* narrows in American English. Although "cult" once meant "a system of religious worship, especially with reference to its rites and ceremonies," it now has a pejorative connotation that gives an odd ring to such sentences as these of Durkheim: "But feasts and rites—in a word, *the cult*—are not the whole of religion."[123] Again: "Although in principle derived from the beliefs, the cult nevertheless reacts upon them, and the myth is often modeled on the rite so as to account for it. . . ."[124] "Cult" now connotes not just feasts and rites but excessive and perhaps obsessive ones, attached to beliefs assumed to be outlandish.[125] For that reason, used without warning today, it can plant in the American reader's mind a different attitude toward the totemic cults than Durkheim had. I decided nevertheless, to retain "cult" in most contexts, for this reason: If it is dropped in favor of terms like "worship" and "practice," which sometimes will do, Durkheim's own use of *le culte* decouples from the cognate term "culture." But that will not do at all. Durkheim's own formidable exploration of religious beliefs and rites—of *représentations collectives,* and *conscience collective,* that is, of shared ways of thinking and acting—was seminal to the vast twentieth-century exploration of "culture."

Different problems arise with the use of "essential," which is nearly, but not entirely, synonymous in English and French. In both, it means "fundamental" and "necessary"; but in America today, if I quote Durkheim as having called religion "an essential and permanent aspect of humanity," he may seem to be saying that religion is "indispensable" and, possibly, advocating it. Some readers might expect a case for prayer in schools to follow or other resuscitations of old-time religion in the public realm. But when Durkheim calls religion an "*essentiel et permanent*" aspect of humanity, he means no such thing. His use of a similar phrase, "integral and permanent," to describe society, brings out what he does mean: Society "arouses in us a whole world of

ideas and feelings that express it but at the same time are an *integral and permanent* part of ourselves."[126] A third phrase, describing *conscience collective,* works similarly: "Being outside and above individual and local contingencies, collective consciousness sees things only in their permanent and fundamental aspect."[127] Therefore, noting Durkheim's own substitutions of "integral" and "fundamental" for "essential," treating the three synonymously, and taking into account subtle differences of shading in different contexts of use, I have sometimes rendered *essentiel* as "essential" but far more often as "fundamental" or "basic."[128] These are, unavoidably, choices. That virtually every one could have been made otherwise inserts the translator's own response to the text into what cannot help but appear to be what it cannot possibly be: the original text "itself," only put into English.

Now, finally, three smaller matters of choice need to be noted here; others will appear in footnotes, as they come up in the text. First, now that we have animated cartoons, the word "animate," as a verb, has a certain incongruous humor. But in *Formes,* "animate" goes with the quite serious ideas of "soul" and "spirit." For one reason or another, though, the alternatives are just as hard to naturalize—or they are humorous as well: "quicken" (as in "the quick and the dead"), "enliven," "vivify," "vitalize." Since we have Tylor and "animist" theory, I kept "animate." The next matter concerns *sentiment,* which in today's American English strongly connotes a feeling that is said (as on a Hallmark card) or at least formulated (sentiment against intervening militarily). In French, it often means direct "feeling," or "awareness" rather than their formulized versions. In English, we cannot say, "I have the sentiment that it will rain." I dropped Swain's "sentiment" almost everywhere. Finally, *se représenter* means to "present to the mind"—in other words, to "conceive" or "imagine." Translating literally, one can arrive at "represent to oneself," and that can mislead. In my first reading of Swain's, "Religion is, above all, a system of ideas by which men *represent to themselves* the society of which they are members," I pictured them creating emblems. Wrong.

But left untouched are certain famous set phrases that after eighty-plus years I feel cannot be extricated from Durkheim's life in English without doing violence to that life—for example, Swain's rendering of Durkheim's celebrated definition of religion and his marvelous phrase "thoroughgoing idiocy" for *illogique foncière,* a brilliantly nonliteral rendering that captures not only Durkheim's sense but also his attitude toward certain accounts of a supposed *mentalité primitive* to which logic is utterly alien.

Sometimes the problem of equivalents lies at a different level from terms and phrases or structure. There is no serviceable American equivalent

for Durkheim's nineteenth-century French and academic mode of expression, even in most scholarly writing. Therefore, paradoxically, the search for equivalence led me to one change that may at first seem radical. What, for example, could be our idiomatic equivalent to Durkheim's editorial "we"? Michael Gane recounts a parody by Maurice Roche that brings out part of the problem.[129] In it, a hapless lecturer, sleepwalking annually through Durkheim's classic *The Rules of Sociological Method,* collides with a wide-awake undergraduate. The student refuses to grant anything, not least Durkheim's "we," the very first word in that text, as it is in *Formes.* The student brings the class to a halt by demanding to know who precisely "we" are. What is more, he refuses to cooperate when what he calls an authoritarian voice addresses him with the "we" that apparently means "you and I": It was unearned common ground.

I too stumble over the editorial "we" in the existing English translations. In Durkheim's day, it was the simply the modest, objective voice of academic or scientific writing (as it is still in the preferred rhetoric of some disciplines).[130] As such, that modest, objective "we" formally gestured toward a scientific collectivity standing behind every published work, despite solo authorship.[131] Nonetheless, it is merely a rhetorical device.[132] So to render the text in an English rhetoric that does not draw the wrong sort of attention to itself, we have substituted "I" for "we," except when "we" seems in context to mean "you and I," including the reader. We have, however, retained the first-person plural in the many statements Durkheim makes about the behavior of human beings generally, including both himself and the reader, or in reference to himself as a member of a group that excludes the reader. We have shifted to the editorial "we" to illustrate our point about how the text sounds without our effort, in retranslating, to reconstruct the plain-sounding neutrality of the original.

We have not changed the text in one respect that may disconcert some readers: *homme* is translated as "man" or "mankind." "Human being" renders *être humain;* and "person," *personne.* This translation does not try to reconstruct Durkheim's gender vocabulary or his outlook. Durkheim's *homme,* "man," includes "woman," at least some of the time; but nowadays we insist on saying "human being" or "person" all of the time. In *Formes,* however, "person" (as used in everyday speech) will not work. Why not? We quote Durkheim: "The two terms [person and individual] are by no means synonymous. In a sense, they oppose more than they imply one another."[133] Besides, while Durkheim is a theorist of social conduct, considered globally and embracing all human beings, it would be an abuse to mark this by inserting a modern terminology that achieves this embrace by means of linguistic affirmative action—in *our*

own time, and for *us* (a pronoun which from now on does not designate an editorial "we," but is meant to include me and the reader). *Our* own usage implies the (ideally) inclusive gender conventions that belong to our own day; Durkheim's implies the quite different gender conventions of his own.

These conventions are implicit in all his writing, and sometimes they are explicit. Like many of his contemporaries, he believed woman's brain and mental capacity to be smaller than man's. Much to take issue with followed from that belief. Although the temptation arises to improve upon the elegant old furniture that is *Formes,* I have resisted it. To give in would amount to Durkheim's posthumous "reconstruction" by me, in a different and unacceptable sense. I cannot be in the business of rehabilitating Durkheim's unenlightened attitudes about women. If sufficient to sink him forever, they should be allowed to. Reconstruction on this account is doubly unacceptable, because it would profoundly alter Durkheim's meaning as that meaning can be objectively known from the passage just cited, and at the same time introduce a deep illogic into the book as a whole. The argument is constructed using evidence from rituals that Durkheim imagines as having had almost exclusively male participation. When Durkheim says "he," referring to an Australian or to a deity, that is most often what he literally means.[134]

Moreover, conducting repairs would displace certain possible critiques. For example, Nancy Jay, a feminist sociologist of religion, argued that insofar as exclusively male rituals provide the empirical foundation for Durkheim's social account of reason, it commits him to one of two anomalous conclusions: Women cannot reason, which is false, or women's ability to reason would require a separate theory.[135] Additionally, reconstructing Durkheim's gender outlook would conceal the sense in which his grand oppositions between sacred and profane, social and individual, mind and body, person and individual, moral and material, are latently an opposition between male and female.[136] Surely it must be the goal of translation to leave intact the internal tensions of the original text—in this case, the limits of the boldly universalistic argument, stunning for its time, that the book attempts. Reconstruction of elegant old furniture must not mean sanding away characteristic features of its original design.

Swain's own reconstruction of Durkheim's French title as "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life" now carries the patina of respectable age. This title has become so much part of the book's life in English that, except in the deletion of one "the," I have not changed it. But I would have preferred the term "elemental," even though *élémentaire* expresses both. The question is not right or wrong translation but the scope each alternative

leaves for right or wrong understanding. On the one hand, "elementary" will do in some respects; think of the concept "elementary particles," defined as being the smallest and most fundamental particles known. On the other hand, in day-to-day usage, "elementary" has a diminutive and vaguely dismissive connotation and sets up the same potential problem for some readers as "simple." Consider Sherlock Holmes's "Elementary, my dear Watson," or consider the charge, "You just don't seem to get the most elementary points," which means the easiest or simplest—addressed by a scold to a dimwit. Durkheim means "simplest" as well, but (in addition to the other considerations already referred to) he means it as particle physicists mean it, scientists who assuredly mean things that challenge the intellect. He seeks to explore building blocks of human social life, as physicists explore building blocks of matter. "Elementary" is suitable only if used in a restricted sense that is not altogether Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's and not at all the scold's. In a sense, Durkheim was attempting in his study what the Curies were attempting in their labs.

Durkheim's "simplest" forms are indispensably part of the most complex. Alternatively, they can be thought of as atoms and compared to the chemical substances that make up the periodic chart, the elements. The *formes* that he discovers in this particular study are the elements to be found in the makeup of the religions he thought of as more *complexes* or as "higher" in an evolutionary sense. Durkheim is interested in "a fundamental and permanent" aspect of humanity and in its "ever-present source," which can be discerned if studied in what he takes to be its *elemental* forms. Whatever those forms are (and I now paraphrase a physicist),[137] they have an underlying identity that persists despite unceasing change and limitless diversity. Moreover, as in the physicist's search for elementary particles, the question of chronological origins is related and yet separable. So if we understand the phrase *formes élémentaires* in that way, we need not get bogged down, as some have, in the notion that Durkheim made the error of thinking totemism brought him to origins in a chronological sense. Instead, we can take him at his word.

Whether he was right or wrong about thinking this or about thinking that the study of Australians could possibly yield up religion in *elemental* form are valid but separate questions. What is important is to grasp the scientific exploration that Durkheim attempted. The burden of the book as a whole is that an aspect of humanity's "fundamental and permanent" nature is to be found in humanity's social nature. And that human, social nature is nothing other than its *vie religieuse*. To show us what is included in this *vie religieuse* requires the full length of a long book. We can already say that this notion goes far beyond what people do specifically as churchmen or -women.

Accordingly, the new title rejects Swain's rendering "*the* religious life." If taken as an unfortunate artifact of literal translation, the phrase "*the* religious life" furnishes Durkheim with a voice in a heavily accented and game but clumsy use of English. It is as if he offered a Gallic shrug to an intellectually swamped American undergraduate and said to him, "As we tell in France, '*c'est la vie*'—that's the life'!" Well, *Non*. The definite article definitely does not belong there. But what about the English phrase "religious life," which suggests a life apart? From the argument of the preceding paragraph, it is obvious that the book is not about monasteries or religious virtuosi, or about beliefs and practices sealed off within a separate sphere of human life uniquely their own. In our own day, "religious life" connotes an exclusively inward and private sphere—but the seventeenth-century world that was hostile to Pilgrims and Puritans did not, and the world of *Formes* does not. Think back to the way Durkheim answered those who believe the function of religion is to offer a theory of the world: "Its true function is to make us act and to help us live."

Finally, I think Durkheim does mean "*the* elemental forms." He offers his study based on Australian ethnographies as a "single, well-conducted experiment." It is very clear, from the first page, that although based upon observations in Aboriginal Australian societies, he intends his findings to reveal the fundamental building blocks of all religion, its ever-present source and natural resource in the mentality, and in the reality, of humankind. Whatever is in theirs is in his and in ours.

Karen E. Fields
Rochester, New York
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NOTES

1. Emile Durkheim, "Contribution to discussion 'Religious Sentiment at the Present Time,'" reproduced in W. S. F. Pickering, *Durkheim on Religion: A Selection of Readings with Bibliographies,* London, Routledge, 1975, p. 184, which includes new translations by Pickering and Jacqueline Redding.
2. Introduction, p. 2.
3. A. A. Goldenweiser, "Emile Durkheim—*Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le Système totémique en Australie,* 1912," originally published in *American Anthropologist* 17, 1915, reproduced in Peter Hamilton, ed., *Emile Durkheim: Critical Assessments,* London and New York, Routledge, 1990, 3:240.
4. Durkheim published three other major books during his lifetime: *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), and *Sui-*

cide (1897). For a comprehensive bibliography of his work, see W. S. F. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion: Themes and Theories,* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, pp. 535–543.

5. Introduction, pp. 2–3.
6. I refer to Paul Tillich's (1955) essay "Religion" in Mark Van Doren, ed., *Man's Right to Knowledge and the Free Use Thereof,* New York, Columbia, 1955, and to Rudolf Otto's (1917) book *Das Heilige,* translated in 1923 as *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational,* John W. Harvey, trans., London, Oxford, 1923.
7. P. 426.
8. P. 9.
9. Goldenweiser, "Emile Durkheim," p. 218. My italics.
10. P. 349 and n. 55.
11. P. 437. One of the many delights of *Formes* is to encounter the nineteenth-century philologists, whose explorations of how language shapes reality (in the Vedas, twenty Sanskrit words for "sky") remain important even today. See p. 75.
12. P. 227.
13. Here I am talking about rhetorical features of the text. On its characteristic logical features, Steven Lukes has written a comprehensive analysis: *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work, A Historical and Critical Study,* London, Penguin, 1973.
14. Durkheim used the word *paradoxale,* which literally means "against doctrine," but the everyday meaning of its English counterpart waters down into mere strangeness.
15. Gaston Richard, originally published in *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse* (1923), reproduced in Pickering, *Durkheim on Religion.* Pickering and Redding explain that they substituted "English" for Richard's own term "Anglican." I imagine he said what he meant.
16. Not being grounded in the real, magic did not survive, except as entertainment. Here, briefly, is the threefold analytical distinction that Durkheim makes: (1) religion is social, built on communities, whereas magical practices are individual, linking a practitioner and a client; (2) religion builds on altruism, and magic on individual utility; and (3) given the previous two points, religion works in the real, whereas magic does not, because religion works morally rather than materially, that is, on human minds operating collectively rather than on things. See pp. 41–42, pp. 360, 363. My own example: It has turned out that gold cannot be made from baser metals, but paper money can be made to be as good as gold.
17. Dominick LaCapra, *Emile Durkheim: Sociologist and Philosopher,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972.
18. Lukes, *Emile Durkheim,* p. 4.
19. Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action,* New York, Free Press, 1968 [1937], 1:421–429.

20. Raymond Aron, *Main Currents of Sociological Thought,* Middlesex, England, Penguin, 1967, 2:66–68.
21. I say this in full awareness of Mordecai Kaplan's embrace of *Formes* as an intellectual foundation for Reconstructionist Judaism and even though Kaplan's student, the well-known popularizer Harold Kushner, uses somewhat Durkheimian formulations. See *To Life! A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking,* Boston, Little, Brown, 1993, esp. chap. 3.
22. Parsons, *Structure of Social Action,* p. 421.
23. But see a splendid article by Patricia Cormack, "*The Rules of Sociological Method:* The Paradox of Durkheim's Manifesto," *Theory and Society,* forthcoming.
24. Judith Ryan provides an illuminating account of the links joining physics, psychology, philosophy, painting, and literature in *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991.
25. According to Frank Pearce, *The Radical Durkheim,* London, Unwin, 1989, p. 3, Foucault did not usually acknowledge his debt to Durkheim. However, according to Stuart Hall, he did indeed. Discussion following a paper, "Constructing the Black Subject." Presented at the conference Race Matters: U.S. Terrain, Princeton University, April 29, 1994.
26. See Terry F. Godlove, *Religion, Interpretation, and Diversity of Belief: The Framework Model from Kant to Durkheim to Davidson,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.
27. In this context, "empirical science" will do, but I retain the French phrase, so that the dense tangle of meanings can be unraveled by the reader according to context. The following statement by Auguste Comte can serve as a guide: "Considered first in its oldest and commonest sense, the word 'positive' designates the real as opposed to the chimerical. In this respect, it well suits the new philosophical spirit, the mark of which is its constant dedication to research that is accessible to our intelligence, to the permanent exclusion of the impenetrable mysteries with which it was occupied in its infancy." See André Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie,* Paris, F. Alcan, 1926, p. 597.
28. On this point, see the papers collected in Said A. Arjomand, ed., *The Political Dimensions of Religion,* Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993.
29. P. 419.
30. Durkheim titled his chapter on soul *La Notion d'âme*—"the idea of soul"—but he could have said *La Notion de l'âme*—"the idea of *the* soul."
31. P. 262.
32. An 1894 publication, a classic almost instantly, launched modern research on the early Greek idea of the soul: E. Rhode, *Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen,* 2 vols., Freiburg, Leipzig, and Tübingen, which appeared in English as *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks,* W. B. Hillis, trans., London, 1925, cited by Jan Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul,* Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 6.
33. Empedocles was one of the early Greek philosophers who thought (like the

Australians) that the soul resides in the blood. And consider this: In Homer, the soul leaves the body via wounds. See Bremmer, *Early Greek Concept,* pp. 3, 15, which also brings out the multifariousness of that concept. For helpful conversation and references, I am indebted to my colleagues Lewis W. Beck, Deborah Modrak, and George Dennis O'Brien.

34. P. 49.
35. P. 54.
36. Pp. 65, 66, 67.
37. P. 271.
38. This argument also lays the foundation for an argument (made in Bk. III, chap. 3, esp. p. 368) against the claim that the concept "cause" can be derived from the individual experience of willing.
39. P. 368.
40. To get a sense of what is involved, work through the intricate diagram in Craig Barclay, "Autobiographical Remembering: Creating Personal Culture," in M. A. Conway, D. C. Rubin, and W. Wagenaar, eds., *Theoretical Perspectives on Autobiographical Memory,* Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992, esp. p. 2.
41. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* Alan Sheridan, trans., New York, Vintage, 1979, pp. 23ff.
42. For conversation and references on this and many of the points that follow, I am indebted to my colleague Ayala Gabriel.
43. P. 265.
44. Adin Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose: A Discourse on the Essence of Jewish Existence and Belief,* Yehuda Hanegbi, trans., New York, Basic Books, 1980, pp. 51–52.
45. Nor does the fact that a powerful abstract notion is to be found in religious tradition by any means make its use suggest residual believerhood.
46. P. 8.
47. P. 419.
48. P. 177. This chapter especially, including its footnotes, has many dry rejoinders.
49. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion,* p. xxiv; Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context,* New York, Harcourt, 1971, pp. 162–163.
50. Quoted from Gouldner's *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* in a valuable discussion of Durkheim by Peter Ekeh: *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974, p. 12.
51. Aron, *Main Currents,* pp. 13–14.
52. Stjepan G. Meštrović formulated the question properly in his *Emile Durkheim and the Reformation of Sociology,* Totowa, NJ, Rowman & Littlefield, 1987, p. 19. There is also a speculative, Freudianized article by J. C. Filloux, "Il ne faut pas oublier que je suis fils de rabbin," *Revue française de sociologie* 17, no. 2, 1976, pp. 259–266.

53. For fascinating suggestions about the relationships between Comte's historical epistemology of science and modern writers, see Johan Heilbron, "Auguste Comte and Modern Epistemology," *Sociological Theory* 8, no. 2, Fall 1990, pp. 152–162. Full-scale analysis of Durkheim's work by professional philosophers has been relatively rare. But see, in addition to Godlove, *Religion, Interpretation, and Diversity,* Warren Schmaus, *Durkheim's Philosophy of Science and the Sociology of Knowledge: Creating an Intellectual Niche,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994.
54. Robert Bellah has disposed of the myths that Durkheim was antipsychological and that he thought a sociology wholly independent of psychology was possible. Robert N. Bellah, *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973, pp. xx–xxi. And see Ryan, *Vanishing Subject,* for an excellent introduction to early psychology and its entrance into the consciousness of educated turn-of-the-century West European and American audiences. Ryan, however, excludes psychoanalysis. See also John Kerr, *A Most Dangerous Method: The Story of Jung, Freud, and Sabina Spielrein,* New York, Vintage Books, 1993, pp. 27–29. Kerr's Introduction provides a sense of the milieu in which Durkheim discussed phenomena such as transmigration of souls and metempsychosis. For a time, investigations into spiritualism were not sharply distinguished from what would later be designated specifically as scientific work.
55. With his characteristic acuteness but without lasting effect on subsequent commentary, Talcott Parsons pointed out that the absence of a theory of social change does not render a theory ahistorical. *Structure of Social Action,* 1:450
56. But see Parsons's brilliant 1937 synthesis, which revealed how ambiguous the relationship of *Formes* is to functionalism (*Structure of Social Action,* esp. 1:441–450), and Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion,* pp. 88–89, 300–317—both of which read *Formes* rather differently than I have done here.
57. P. 1.
58. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London, Verson, 1983.
59. For a crisply made case of why not, see Lukes, *Emile Durkheim,* pp. 477–479. For early ethnographers' criticisms of the work that emerged almost immediately, see A. A. Goldenweiser, "Review of *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieux: Le Système totémique en Australie*" (originally published in 1915), in Peter Hamilton, ed., *Emile Durkheim: Critical Assessments,* London and New York, Routledge, 1990, 3:238–252; and another review (published in 1913), reproduced in Pickering, *Durkheim on Religion,* pp. 205–208.
60. Lukes, *Emile Durkheim.*
61. Robert Nisbet, *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim,* New York, Oxford, 1974.
62. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion.*
63. Although many readers have arrived at this under their own steam, scholarly sources include Mary Douglas's view on "the Durkheimian premise that soci-

ety and God can be equated." Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology,* London, Barrie and Rockliff, 1970, quoted by Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion* (whose discussion, pp. 227–241, provides a learned analysis and many useful references). See also Aron's very strong statement in *Main Currents*: "It seems to me absolutely inconceivable to define the essence of religion in terms of the worship which the individual pledges to the group, for in my eyes the essence of impiety is precisely the worship of the social order. To suggest that the object of the religious feelings is society transfigured is not to save but to degrade that human reality which sociology seeks to understand" (p. 68).

64. P. 44. *Le Petit Robert* quotes this definition to illustrate the term *système* in the sense of "a structured set of abstract things."
65. He is thought to have been influenced in this direction by his reading of Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion,* p. 63). But readers who hear echoes of historical materialism in this movement from deed to idea are referred to, pp. 385ff. There Durkheim talks about the elaboration of rites in a way that brings to mind the later Marxist use of "relative autonomy," to discuss the elaboration of beliefs.
66. A main argument of Bk. I, Chap. 4, esp. p. 93. It sometimes goes unnoticed that Durkheim points out precisely those traits of the clan that make its coherence improbable: no stable authority, not based on well-defined territory or common residence, not necessarily consanguineous, and virtually no utilitarian functions. Cf., p. 234.
67. This formulation is drawn from Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 17–19.
68. P. 208. My italics. The French reads as follows: [*Le totem*] *exprime et symbolise deux sortes de choses différentes. D'une part, il est la forme extérieure et sensible de ce que nous avons appelé le principe ou le dieu totémique. Mais d'un autre côté, il est aussi le symbole de cette société déterminée qu'on appele le clan. C'en est le drapeau; c'est le signe par lequel chaque clan se distingue des autres, la marque visible de sa personnalité, marque que porte tout ce qui fait partie du clan à un titre quelconque, hommes, bêtes et choses. Si donc il est, à la fois, le symbole du dieu et de la société, n'est-ce pas que le dieu et la société ne font qu'un? Comment l'emblème du groupe aurait-il pu devenir la figure de cette quasi divinité, si le groupe et la divinité étaient deux réalités distinctes? Le dieu du clan, le principe totémique, ne peut donc être autre chose que le clan lui-même, mais hypostasié et représenté aux imaginations sous les espèces sensibles du végétal ou de l'animal qui sert de totem.*
69. The controverted "reduction" of God to society can be taken in at least two senses: simplifying something complex to the point of distorting it, or restating something in different but equivalent terms (e.g., 2/6 = 1/3). The fact that both in this context imply diminishment reveals the theological strata of the controversy. (A third sense, the theory of *explanation,* is not at issue.) If God is

in the definition of religion, keeping theological and nontheological things aloft is like juggling rubber balls and wooden Indian clubs at the same time.

70. The reader who is prepared to jump to conclusions about what the Durkheim whom we saw addressing "free believers" was prepared to say about God should turn now to p. 15, and reflect on the nicety of this statement about man's social being, which "represents within us the highest reality in the intellectual and moral realm *that is knowable through observation:* I mean society." My italics.
71. In these terms, I miss the point of laboring to protect God's separateness, as in the following passage of Pickering's (*Durkheim's Sociology of Religion,* p. 235): "The danger is always to jump the parallel [society is to its members as God is to the faithful] and make the two concepts or realities identical, or at least to suggest that one *is* the other. Critics claim that Durkheim makes such a step, but they disregard all caution. . . . Durkheim is much more careful, and nowhere does he take the final and irrevocable step."
72. For a carefully reasoned statement of this view, see Melford E. Spiro, "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation," in Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion,* London, Tavistock, 1966.
73. P. 172.
74. See, for example, p. 77, on naturism: "It is not by praying to them, celebrating them in feasts and sacrifices, and imposing fasts and privations on himself that he could have prevented them from harming him or obliged them to serve his purposes. Such procedures could have succeeded only on very rare occasions—miraculously, so to speak. If the point of religion was to give us a representation of the world that would guide us in our dealings with it, then religion was in no position to fulfill its function, and all peoples would not have been slow to notice that fact: Failures, infinitely more common than successes, would have notified them very quickly that they were on the wrong path; and religion, constantly shaken by these constant disappointments, would have been unable to last."
75. P. 239.
76. Durkheim not only denies that reconciliation is possible but also dismisses that argument along those lines as beside the point. Pp. 419–431ff. See LaCapra, *Emile Durkheim,* p. 289.
77. See Jay, *Throughout Your Generations,* pp. 30–40, where we encounter an instructive example of beliefs that could not exist if, to exist, they had to be *merely* believable—for example, male priests disguised as pregnant women and conducting blood sacrifices. Jay argues that unilineal descent through fathers is publicly done through blood sacrificial rites, in rites that are often explicitly formulated as transcending birth from mothers. It is precisely through participation in those rites that (a counterfactual) one-sided descent is collectively established as real.

78. To any reader who imagines doubt as the exclusive intellectual property of recent times or of cultures near our own, I recommend a spectacular article by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Durkheim's direct intellectual descendant: "The Sorcerer and His Magic," in *Structural Anthropology,* Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1967 [1963].
79. P. 214. Durkheim does not make the assumption that the rational capacity of man differs from race to race or from time to time. For him, humanity is one. For a statement of the opposite assumption, see Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures,* Paris, Alcan, 1910, which Durkheim disputes throughout *Formes.*
80. This remark by Comte appears in the *Petit Robert,* to illustrate one sense of the word *simple.*
81. Cormack, "Rules of Sociological Method," has pointed out that this strategy is akin to that used by the ancient Greek rhetoricians, especially the sophists.
82. He repeats this point in criticizing concepts like "primitive" and "savage," and elsewhere. See his side criticism of Frazer, for example, p. 183, and the distinction between origins and elements that he takes for granted throughout, for example, p. 55.
83. See Durkheim's rationale for simplifying in order to reduce differences and variations to a minimum (pp. 5–7). Note also that he opens the first chapter of Book One with the observation that even the simplest religions known are of very great complexity (p. 45).
84. One sometimes hears the simplistic consideration that Durkheim might have found exotic cases expedient at a time in France when religion was a hot button issue, and the anti-Semitism exposèd in the Dreyfus Affair might have made it still hotter for Durkheim. But then, what would we make of the fact that an international legion of scholars accorded totemism general theoretical interest? See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism,* Rodney Needham, trans., Boston, Beacon Press, 1963.
85. Peter Berger drew out some of these implications of *Formes* by devising the concept of "plausibility structures," communities whose everyday life takes for granted religious definitions of reality. See *The Sacred Canopy,* Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1967, pp. 16, 46, 156.
86. P. 206.
87. Psychologist Craig Barclay tells me that the scheme Durkheim lays out is more or less the classical paradigm of conditioned response. Little has been written about how closely Durkheim followed developments in psychology. Lukes's footnotes indicate that Durkheim read Wilhelm Wundt through the 1880s and 1890s, and it is clear in *Formes* that he closely read the work of William James, whose *Principles of Psychology* appeared in French translation in 1910. Besides, James (according to Ryan, *Vanishing Subject,* pp. 12, 17) disseminated and received ideas, on and from both sides of the Atlantic, even as he developed his

own, and his earliest publications in France appeared in a journal edited by Durkheim's teacher, Charles Renouvier.

88. See Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984, on the passage of such *effervescences* into American literary art; Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs,* New York, Macmillan, 1970, the self-aware artist of buildings and Nazi *effervescences;* and Marcel Mauss, Durkheim's younger collaborator who lived to see the Nazis' *effervescences* and then saw how "many large modern societies" could be "hypnotized like Australians are by their dances, and set in motion like a children's roundabout." Quoted in Lukes, *Emile Durkheim,* p. 338n.
89. P. 213.
90. Ibid.
91. P. 211.
92. P. 223.
93. Cf. the classically instructive but (I believe) mistaken view of Parsons, *Structure of Social Action,* pp. 442ff. Parsons objected to Durkheim's *pensée* and *conscience collectives* as reified "group mind" concepts. But actually, I think, not only the mind but also the senses are not fully accounted for if conceived of in their individual aspects alone. Consider what the neurologist Oliver Sacks tells us about "Virgil," blind from early childhood, who through surgery forty-five years later regained the physical capacity to see. But, not having "spent a lifetime *learning* to see," he did not regain the seen world of his contemporaries—a condition for which neurologists have the interesting term "agnostic." See Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales,* New York, Knopf, 1995, pp. 108–151, esp. pp. 114–115.
94. Approvingly quoted by Lukes, *Emile Durkheim,* p. 25.
95. See ibid., pp. 25–26.
96. P. 122.
97. Alan Unterman, *Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend,* London, Thames and Hudson, 1991, p. 25.
98. P. 226. Here is a glaring mistake by Joseph Ward Swain, who for *l'étendu* and *l'inétendu* wrote, respectively, "heard" and "not heard" (as if Durkheim had written *l'entendu* and *l'inentendu*), thereby making the connection to Descartes disappear and also the logic that joins this chapter with the one immediately following, on the idea of soul. The 1975 translation by Pickering and Redding (*Durkheim on Religion,* p. 134) renders *étendu* and *inétendu* as if the difference was a matter of size: "The impressions made on us by the physical world cannot, by definition, embody anything which transcends this world. The tangible can only be made into the tangible; the *vast* cannot be made into the *minute.*" My italics.
99. Lukes, *Emile Durkheim,* p. 26.

100. I have no access to the evolving *représentations,* but even at this distance, standing only within the argument of *Formes,* I venture to predict that, by now, the bones were not preserved by human beings but preserved themselves, were not dusted off by human hands but resurrected themselves, that in so doing they towed upward with them on the rope of miracle the eternal Lithuanian nation-state, and that, for some among Lithuanians sons and daughters, they have acquired exceptional virtues.
101. After defining *sacré,* Durkheim sometimes uses the term *saint,* without saying how the two are related. I speculate that the shifting has to do, at least in part, with the problem sacred objects posed for Durkheim's written representation. If "holy" is used to render *saint,* there is a risk of sliding over into religious actors' point of view, where religious objects are intrinsically holy. But at the same time, given in French was a fixed phrase incorporating the term *saint*: *L'arche sainte* specifically denotes the Holy Ark but is also equivalent to "sacred cow." The term *saint* is more frequent in Book III than elsewhere, four of whose five chapters are about ritual conduct regarding things that *have already been sanctified* (but are, from the actors' standpoint, intrinsically holy). As the context shifts, the same object comes into view as different at different moments, one during the process of sanctification, the other after the process of sanctification is complete. To be represented was not only changing time, and not only changing viewpoints, but also the changing fundamental nature of the object itself. I speculate that, for Durkheim, the two terms were sometimes synonymous and sometimes not.
102. A serviceable concept of "believing" need imply no more than this. In three studies about colonial settings, I have shown how British rulers came to accept witchcraft and prophetic dreaming as real and how supernatural utterance by millenarian prophets forced real-world colonial police into action. See "Political Contingencies of Witchcraft in Colonial Central Africa: Culture and the State in Marxist Theory," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 16, no. 3, December 1982; *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985; "I Had a Dream: Dreams and Visions upon the Political Landscape of Waking Life," *Etnofoor* 4, no. 2, 1991.
103. See the articles Freud published in 1913 as *Totem and Taboo.* Do not overlook his footnote references to Durkheim's work, including *Formes.*
104. In one place, Durkheim uses the term "fiction" but spins it: There is a reality that gains religious expression only through imaginative transfiguration (p. 385).
105. P. 223.
106. See Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1987, pp. 170–191, quoted in Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review,* no. 181, May–June 1990, pp. 95–118, an exploration of reason, identity, and community deployed within the socially constructed framework of quasi-biological race.

107. P. 239.
108. Quoted by Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 42.
109. Pickering, *Durkheim on Religion,* pp. ix, 102–166.
110. P. 19 in Swain translation; pp. 6–7 in present one.
111. Lukes, *Emile Durkheim,* p. 433n.
112. See Kerr, *A Most Dangerous Method,* pp. 27–29.
113. On this point I am indebted to my colleague William J. McGrath, author of *Freud's Discovery of Psychoanalysis: The Politics of Hysteria,* Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1986. Personal communication, February 20, 1994. McGrath confirms the absence of correspondence between the two men.
114. In *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics,* New York, Norton, 1952, pp. 100–161. In addition, Meštrović, *Emile Durkheim,* p. 109, has pointed out a striking kinship of approach to magic as early as the 1907 paper, "Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices," in which Freud describes the obsessional neurosis as a "privatized religious system."
115. My heart nearly stopped when, two years into the project and working from the first edition, I found something in the Bibliothèque nationale called a second, "revised" edition of *Formes,* published in 1921. Why or under what inspiration (Durkheim having been dead since 1917) proved impossible to discover. Comparison showed that this "revision" contains many typographical errors not present in the first. The current Presses Universitaires de France paperback is based on that second edition.
116. Looking for something abstract, I queried various colleagues as to the possibility of its having a technical meaning in some body of philosophical work but turned up nothing. What I found in the *Petit Robert* was horrifyingly literal: fourteenth-century *surgeons* coined the term.
117. Robert Alun Jones and Douglas Kibbee have argued this point quite cogently in "Durkheim in Translation: Durkheim and Translation," a paper presented at the conference Humanistic Dilemmas: Translation in the Humanities and Social Sciences, State University of New York at Binghamton, September 27–28, 1991.
118. See his "Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives," *RMM,* 6, 1898.
119. On this point, see Nisbet, *Sociology of Emile Durkheim,* p. 187, and the clear discussion of Durkheim on morality that follows. Note as well Durkheim's contrast of "moral" and "physical" at p. 192.
120. P. 275.
121. On this point, see Durkheim's famous discussion of crime in *The Rules of Sociological Method.*
122. Meštrović, *Emile Durkheim,* makes a good case that this view is common in-

tellectual ground between Durkheim and Freud (in *Civilization and Its Discontents*). Durkheim's "individual" would parallel Freud's "*es*," which entered English as "id."

123. P. 430. My italics.
124. P. 99.
125. In fact, survey research has shown that the term "cult" in this pejorative sense has become sufficiently potent not only to color the response in America to those "new" religious movements that are called "cults," but indeed to influence legal proceedings—so much so that a strong case has been made for abandoning the term altogether in serious scholarship. See James T. Richardson, "Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative," *Review of Religious Research* 34, no. 4, June 1993, who also surveys the evolution of the term's scholarly usages in the twentieth century. I am indebted to Dr. Richardson for sharing with me various references on this terrain of contested words.
126. P. 226. My italics.
127. P. 445.
128. Durkheim brings out this nuance on p. 5. "Everything is boiled down to what is absolutely indispensable, to that without which there would be no religion. But the indispensable is also the fundamental [*essentiel*], in other words, that which it is above all important for us to know."
129. Michael Gane, *On Durkheim's Rules of Sociological Method,* London, Routledge, 1989, p. 9.
130. However, Claude Lévi-Strauss has given unsettling philosophical reasons for referring to himself in the third person or as "we": "Throughout these pages, the 'we' the author has deliberately adhered to has not been meant simply as an expression of diffidence. . . . If there is one conviction that has been intimately borne upon the author of this work during twenty years devoted to the study of myths . . . it is that the solidity of the self, the major preoccupation of the whole of Western philosophy, does not withstand persistent application to the same object, which comes to pervade it through and through and to imbue it with an experiential awareness of its own unreality" (p. 625). I am indebted to the philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe for this reference and for instructive correspondence on several issues.
131. Durkheim's scientific collectivity included distinguished researchers in their own right, such as Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, whose works he continually cites.
132. See the discussion on this issue by John and Doreen Weightman, translators of Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Naked Man: Introduction to a Science of Mythology,* vol. 4, New York, Harper & Row, 1981 [1971], p. 625.
133. P. 274–275.
134. Women come up explicitly, however, in various contexts—for example, male

initiation rites (in which they are designated as profane), observances regarding maternal totems, and, occasionally, female mythical messages.

135. Nancy Jay, "Gender and Dichotomy," *Feminist Studies* 7, no. 1, pp. 38–56.
136. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations,* p. 136.
137. Leon Lederman, *The God Particle: If the Universe Is the Answer, What Is the Question?,* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 34.

The Elementary Forms of RELIGIOUS LIFE

INTRODUCTION

I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How, then, can those elements be uncovered?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The same applies to space. As Hamelin[7] has shown, space is not the vague and indeterminate medium that Kant imagined. If purely and absolutely homogeneous, it would be of no use and would offer nothing for thought to hold on to. Spatial representation essentially consists in a primary coordination of given sense experience. But this coordination would be impossible if the parts of space were qualitatively equivalent, if they really were mutually interchangeable. To have a spatial ordering of things is to be able to situate them differently: to place some on the right, others on the left, these above, those below, north or south, east or west, and so forth, just as, to arrange states of consciousness temporally, it must be possible to locate them at definite dates. That is, space would not be itself if, like time, it was not divided and differentiated. But where do these divisions that are essential to

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[10]Ibid., pp. 34ff.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Both solutions give rise to grave difficulties.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

action of objects calls forth in our minds. Thus they are individual states that are wholly[17] explained by the psychic nature of the individual. But if the categories are essentially collective representations, as I think they are, they translate states of the collectivity, first and foremost. They depend upon the way in which the collectivity is organized, upon its morphology, its religious, moral, and economic institutions, and so on. Between these two kinds of representations, then, is all the distance that separates the individual from the social; one can no more derive the second from the first than one can deduce the society from the individual, the whole from the part, or the complex from the simple.[18] Society is a reality *sui generis;* it has its own characteristics that are either not found in the rest of the universe or are not found there in the same form. The representations that express society therefore have an altogether different content from the purely individual representations, and one can be certain in advance that the former add something to the latter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hence society cannot leave the categories up to the free choice of individuals without abandoning itself. To live, it requires not only a minimum moral consensus but also a minimum logical consensus that it cannot do without either. Thus, in order to prevent dissidence, society weighs on its members with all its authority. Does a mind seek to free itself from these norms of all thought? Society no longer considers this a human mind in the full sense, and treats it accordingly. This is why it is that when we try, even deep down inside, to get away from these fundamental notions, we feel that we are not fully free; something resists us, from inside and outside ourselves. Outside us, it is opinion that judges us; more than that, because society is represented inside us as well, it resists these revolutionary impulses from within. We feel that we cannot abandon ourselves to them without our thought's ceasing to be truly human. Such appears to be the origin of the very special authority that is inherent in reason and that makes us trustingly accept its promptings. This is none other than the authority of society[19] passing into certain ways of thinking that are the indispensable conditions of all

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BOOK ONE

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

CHAPTER ONE

DEFINITION OF RELIGIOUS PHENOMENA AND OF RELIGION[1]

In order to identify the simplest and most primitive religion that observation can make known to us, we must first define what is properly understood as a religion. If we do not, we run the risk of either calling a system of ideas and practices religion that are in no way religious, or of passing by religious phenomena without detecting their true nature. A good indication that this danger is not imaginary, and the point by no means a concession to empty methodological formalism, is this: Having failed to take that precaution, M. Frazer,* a scholar to whom the comparative science of religions is nevertheless greatly indebted, failed to recognize the profoundly religious character of the beliefs and rites that will be studied below—beliefs and rites in which, I submit, the original seed of religious life in humanity is visible. In the matter of definition, then, there is a prejudicial question that must be treated before any other. It is not that I hope to arrive straightaway at the deep and truly explanatory features of religion, for these can be determined only at the end of the research. But what is both necessary and possible is to point out a certain number of readily visible outward features that allow us to recognize religious phenomena wherever they are encountered, and that prevent their being confused with others. I turn to this preliminary step.

If taking this step is to yield the results it should, we must begin by freeing our minds of all preconceived ideas. Well before the science of religions instituted its methodical comparisons, men had to create their own idea of what religion is. The necessities of existence require all of us, believers and unbelievers, to conceive in some fashion those things in the midst of which

*Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941).

[1]I have already tried to define the phenomenon of religion, in a work published by *AS*, vol. II [1899], pp. 1ff. ["De la Definition des phénomènes religieux"]. As will be seen, the definition given there differs from the one I now propose. At the end of this chapter (p. 44, n. 68), I will give the reasons for these modifications. They do not, however, involve any fundamental change in the conceptualization of the facts.

we live, about which we continually make judgments, and of which our conduct must take account. But since these notions are formed unmethodically, in the comings and goings of life, they cannot be relied on and must be rigorously kept to one side in the examination that follows. It is not our preconceptions, passions, or habits that must be consulted for the elements of the definition we need; definition is to be sought from reality itself.

Let us set ourselves before this reality. Putting aside all ideas about religion in general, let us consider religions in their concrete reality and try to see what features they may have in common: Religion can be defined only in terms of features that are found wherever religion is found. In this comparison, then, we will incorporate all the religious systems we can know, past as well as present, the most primitive and simple as well as the most modern and refined, for we have no right to exclude some so as to keep only certain others, and no logical method of doing so. To anyone who sees religion as nothing other than a natural manifestation of human activity, all religions are instructive, without exception of any kind: Each in its own way expresses man, and thus each can help us understand better that aspect of our nature. Besides, we have seen that the preference for studying religion among the most civilized peoples is far from being the best method.[2]

Before taking up the question and in order to help the mind free itself of commonsense notions whose influence can prevent us from seeing things as they are, it is advisable to examine how those prejudices have entered into some of the commonest definitions.

I

One notion that is generally taken to be characteristic of all that is religious is the notion of the supernatural. By that is meant any order of things that goes beyond our understanding; the supernatural is the world of mystery, the unknowable, or the incomprehensible. Religion would then be a kind of speculation upon all that escapes science, and clear thinking generally. According to Spencer, "Religions that are diametrically opposite in their dogmas agree in tacitly recognizing that the world, with all it contains and all that surrounds it, is a mystery seeking an explanation"; he makes them out basically to consist of "the belief in the omnipresence of something that goes

[2]See above, p. 3. I do not push the necessity of these definitions further or the method to be followed. The exposition is to be found in my *Règles de la méthode sociologique* [Paris, Alcan, 1895], pp. 43ff. Cf. *Le Suicide*; [*étude de sociologie*] (Paris, F. Alcan [1897]), pp. 1ff.

beyond the intellect."[3] Similiarly, Max Müller saw all religion as "an effort to conceive the inconceivable and to express the inexpressible, an aspiration toward the infinite."[4]

Certainly the role played by the feeling of mystery has not been unimportant in certain religions, including Christianity. Even so, the importance of this role has shown marked variation at different moments of Christian history. There have been periods when the notion of mystery has become secondary and even faded altogether. To men of the seventeenth century, for example, dogma contained nothing that unsettled reason. Faith effortlessly reconciled itself with science and philosophy; and thinkers like Pascal, who felt strongly that there is something profoundly obscure in things, were so little in harmony with their epochs that it was their fate to be misunderstood by their contemporaries.[5] Therefore, it would seem rash to make an idea that has been subject to periodic eclipse the essential element even of Christianity.

What is certain, in any case, is that this idea appears very late in the history of religions. It is totally alien not only to the peoples called primitive but also to those who have not attained a certain level of intellectual culture. Of course, when we see men imputing extraordinary virtues to insignificant objects, or populating the universe with extraordinary principles made up of the most disparate elements and possessing a sort of ubiquity that is hard to conceptualize, it is easy for us to find an air of mystery in these ideas. It seems to us that these men have resigned themselves to ideas so problematic for our modern reason only because they have been unable to find more rational ones. In reality, however, the explanations that amaze us seem to the primitive the simplest in the world. He sees them not as a kind of *ultima ratio** to which the intellect resigns itself in despair but as the most direct way of conceiving and understanding what he observes around him. For him, there is nothing strange in being able, by voice or gesture, to command the elements, hold up or accelerate the course of the stars, make the rain fall or stop it, and so on. The rites he uses to ensure the fertility of the soil or of the animal species that nourish him are no more irrational in his eyes than are, in our

*Last resort.

[3][Herbert Spencer, *First Principles,* New York, D. Appleton, 1862, French translation based on the sixth English edition], Paris, F. Alcan [1902], pp. 38–39, [p. 37 in the English edition. Trans.].

[4]Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religions* [London, Longmans, 1873], p. 18. Cf. [*Lectures on*] *the Origin and* [*Growth*] *of Religion* [*as Illustrated by the Religions of India,* London, Longmans, 1878], p. 23.

[5]The same turn of mind is also to be found in the period of scholasticism, as is shown in the formula according to which the philosophy of that period was defined, *Fides quaerens intellectum* [Faith in search of intellect. Trans.].

own eyes, the technical processes that our agronomists use for the same purpose. The forces he brings into play by these various means do not seem to him particularly mysterious. Certainly, these forces differ from those the modern scientist conceives of and teaches us to use; they behave differently and cannot be controlled in the same way; but to the one who believes in them, they are no more unintelligible than gravitation or electricity is to physicists today.

Furthermore, as we will see in the course of this work, the idea of natural forces is very likely derived from that of religious forces, so between the one and the other there cannot be the chasm that separates the rational from the irrational. Not even the fact that religious forces are often conceived of as spiritual entities and conscious wills is any proof of their irrationality. Reason does not resist *a priori* the idea that inanimate bodies might be moved by intelligences, as human bodies are, even though present-day science does not easily accommodate this hypothesis. When Leibniz proposed to conceive the external world as an immense society of intelligences, between which there were not and could not be any but spiritual relations, he meant to be working as a rationalist. He did not see this universal animism as anything that might offend the intellect.

Besides, the idea of the supernatural, as we understand it, is recent. It presupposes an idea that is its negation, and that is in no way primitive. To be able to call certain facts supernatural, one must already have an awareness that there is a *natural order of things,* in other words, that the phenomena of the universe are internally linked according to necessary relationships called laws. Once this principle is established, anything that departs from those laws necessarily appears as beyond nature and, thus, beyond reason: For what is in this sense natural is also rational, those relations expressing only the manner in which things are logically connected. Now, the idea of universal determinism is of recent origin; even the greatest thinkers of classical antiquity did not achieve full awareness of it. That idea is territory won by the empirical sciences; it is the postulate on which they rest and which their advancement has proved. So long as this postulate was lacking or not well established, there was nothing about the most extraordinary events that did not appear perfectly conceivable. So long as what is immovable and inflexible about the order of things was unknown, and so long as it was seen as the work of contingent wills, it was of course thought natural that these wills or others could modify the order of things arbitrarily. For this reason, the miraculous interventions that the ancients ascribed to their gods were not in their eyes miracles, in the modern sense of the word. To them, these interventions were beautiful, rare, or terrible spectacles, and objects of surprise and won-

der (θαύματα, *mirabilia, miracula*); but they were not regarded as glimpses into a mysterious world where reason could not penetrate.

That mind-set is all the more readily understandable to us because it has not completely disappeared. Although the principle of determinism is firmly established in the physical and natural sciences, its introduction into the social sciences began only a century ago, and its authority there is still contested. The idea that societies are subject to necessary laws and constitute a realm of nature has deeply penetrated only a few minds. It follows that true miracles are thought possible in society. There is, for example, the accepted notion that a legislator can create an institution out of nothing and transform one social system into another, by fiat—just as the believers of so many religions accept that the divine will made the world out of nothing or can arbitrarily mutate some beings into others. As regards social things, we still have the mind-set of primitives. But if, in matters sociological, so many people today linger over this old-fashioned idea, it is not because social life seems obscure and mysterious to them. Quite the opposite: If they are so easily contented with such explanations, if they cling to these illusions that are repeatedly contradicted by experience, it is because social facts seem to them the most transparent things in the world. This is so because they have not yet appreciated the real obscurity, and because they have not yet grasped the need to turn to the painstaking methods of the natural sciences in order progressively to sweep away the darkness. The same cast of mind is to be found at the root of many religious beliefs that startle us in their oversimplification. Science, not religion, has taught men that things are complex and difficult to understand. But, Jevons replies,[6] the human mind has no need of properly scientific education to notice that there are definite sequences and a constant order of succession between phenomena or to notice that this order is often disturbed. At times the sun is suddenly eclipsed; the rain does not come in the season when it is expected; the moon is slow to reappear after its periodic disappearance, and the like. Because these occurrences are outside the ordinary course of events, people have imputed to them extraordinary, exceptional—in a word, extranatural—causes. It is in this form, Jevons claims, that the idea of the supernatural was born at the beginning of history; and it is in this way and at this moment that religion acquired its characteristic object.

The supernatural, however, is not reducible to the unforeseen. The new is just as much part of nature as the opposite. If we notice that, in general, phenomena occur one after the other in a definite order, we also notice that

[6][Frank Byron] Jevons, *Introduction to the History of Religions* [London, Methuen, 1896], p.15.

the order is never more than approximate, that it is not exactly the same at different times, and that it has all kinds of exceptions. With even very little experience, we become accustomed to having our expectations unmet; and these setbacks occur too often to seem extraordinary to us. Given a certain element of chance, as well as a certain uniformity in experience, we have no reason to attribute the one to causes and forces different from those to which the other is subject. To have the idea of the supernatural, then, it is not enough for us to witness unexpected events; these events must be conceived of as impossible besides—that is, impossible to reconcile with an order that rightly or wrongly seems to be a necessary part of the order of things. It is the positive sciences that have gradually constructed this notion of a necessary order. It follows that the contrary notion cannot have predated those sciences.

Furthermore, no matter how men have conceived their experience of novelties and chance occurrences, these conceptions can in no way be used to characterize religion. Religious conceptions aim above all to express and explain not what is exceptional and abnormal but what is constant and regular. As a general rule, the gods are used far less to account for monstrosity, oddity, and anomaly than for the normal march of the universe, the movement of the stars, the rhythm of the seasons, the annual growth of vegetation, the perpetuation of species, and so forth. Hence, any notion that equates religion with the unexpected is wide of the mark. Jevons's reply is that this way of conceiving religious forces is not primitive. According to him, people conceived of them first in order to account for disorder and accident, and only later used them to explain the uniformities of nature.[7] But it is unclear what could have made men impute such obviously contradictory functions to them, one after the other. Moreover, the supposition that sacred beings were at first confined to the negative role of disturbers is completely arbitrary. As indeed we will see, starting with the simplest religions we know, the fundamental task of sacred beings has been to maintain the normal course of life by positive action.[8]

Thus the idea of mystery is not at all original. It does not come to man as a given; man himself has forged this idea as well as its contrary. For this reason, it is only in a small number of advanced religions that the idea of mystery has any place at all. Therefore it cannot be made the defining characteristic of religious phenomena without excluding from the definition most of the facts to be defined.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[8] See below Bk. III. chap. 2.

II

Another idea by which many have tried to define religion is that of divinity. According to M. Réville,[9] "Religion is the determination of human life by the sense of a bond joining the human mind with the mysterious mind whose domination of the world and of itself it recognizes, and with which it takes pleasure in feeling joined." It is a fact that if the word "divinity" is taken in a precise and narrow sense, this definition leaves aside a multitude of obviously religious facts. The souls of the dead and spirits of all kinds and ranks, with which the religious imaginations of so many diverse peoples have populated the world, are always the objects of rites and sometimes even of regular cults. Strictly speaking, however, they are not gods. Still, all that is necessary to make the definition include them is to replace the word "god" with the more inclusive term "spiritual being."

This is what Tylor has done. "In studying the religions of lower races," he says, "the first point is to define and specify what one means by religion. If one insists that the term means belief in a supreme being . . . , a certain number of tribes will be excluded from the world of religion. But that too-narrow definition has the flaw of identifying religion with certain of its particular developments. . . . It seems better to set 'spiritual beings' as a minimum definition."[10] "Spiritual beings" must be understood to mean conscious subjects that have capacities superior to those of ordinary men, which therefore rightly includes the souls of the dead, genies, and demons as well as deities, properly so-called. It is important to notice immediately the particular idea of religion that this definition entails. The only relations we can have with beings of this sort are determined by the nature ascribed to them. They are conscious beings, and we can only influence them as we influence consciousnesses generally, that is, by psychological means, by trying to convince or rouse them either with words (invocations and prayers) or with offerings and sacrifices. And since the object of religion would then be to order our relations with these special beings, there could be religion only where there are prayers, sacrifices, propitiatory rites, and the like. In this way, we would have a very simple criterion for distinguishing what is religious from what is not. Frazer[11] systematically applies this criterion, as do several ethnographers.[12]

[9][Albert Réville], *Prolégomènes de l'histoire des religions* [Paris, Fischbacher, 1881], p. 34.

[10]Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture,* vol. I [London, John Murray, 1873, p. 491].

[11]Starting with the first edition of *The Golden Bough,* vol. I, pp. 30–32. [James Frazer, *The Golden Bough,* 2 vols., London and New York, Macmillan, 1890.]

[12]Including [Sir Baldwin] Spencer and [Francis James] Gillen and even [Konrad Theodor] Preuss, who calls all nonindividualized religious forces magic.

But however obvious this definition may seem, given habits of mind that we owe to our own religious upbringing, there are many facts to which it is not applicable but that nevertheless belong to the domain of religion.

In the first place, there are great religions from which the idea of gods and spirits is absent, or plays only a secondary and inconspicuous role. This is the case in Buddhism. Buddhism, says Burnouf, "takes its place in opposition to Brahmanism as a morality without god and an atheism without Nature."[13] "It recognizes no god on whom man depends," says M. Barth; "its doctrine is absolutely atheist."[14] And M. Oldenberg, for his part, calls it "a religion without god."[15] The entire essence of Buddhism is contained in four propositions that the faithful call the Four Noble Truths.[16] The first states that the existence of suffering is tied to the perpetual change of things; the second finds the cause of suffering in desire; the third makes the suppression of desire the only way to end suffering; the fourth lists the three stages that must be passed through to end suffering—uprightness, meditation, and finally wisdom, full knowledge of the doctrine. The end of the road—deliverance, salvation by Nirvana—is reached after these stages have been passed through.

In none of these principles is there any question of divinity. The Buddhist is not preoccupied with knowing where this world of becoming in which he lives and suffers came from; he accepts it as a fact,[17] and all his striving is to escape it. On the other hand, for this work of salvation he counts only on himself; he "has no god to thank, just as in his struggle he calls upon none to help."[18] Instead of praying—in the usual sense of the word, turning to a superior being to beg for help—he withdraws into himself and meditates. This is not to say "that he denies outright the existence of beings

[13][Eugène] Burnouf, *Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme indien,* 2d. ed. [Paris, Maisonneuve, 1876], p. 464. The last word of the text means that Buddhism does not even accept the existence of an eternal Nature.

[14]Auguste Barth, *The Religions of India* [translated from French by Rev. J. Wood, London, Houghton Mifflin, 1882], p. 110.

[15][Hermann] Oldenberg, *Le Bouddha* [*Sa vie, sa doctrine, sa communauté,* translated from the German by A. Foucher, Paris, F. Alcan, 1894, p. 51. I could not find an edition Durkheim lists as translated by "Hoey" and giving the page as 53. Trans.].

[16]Ibid. [pp. 214, 318]. Cf. Hendrick Kern, *Histoire du bouddhisme dans l'Inde,* vol. I [Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1901], pp. 389ff.

[17]Oldenberg, *Bouddha,* p. 259 [this passage actually examines the denial of the existence of the soul. Trans.]; Barth, *Religions of India,* p. 110.

[18]Oldenberg, *Bouddha,* p. 314.

named Indra, Agni, or Varuna;[19] but he feels that he owes them nothing and has nothing to do with them," because their power is effective only over the things of this world—and those things, for him, are without value. He is thus atheist in the sense that he is uninterested in whether gods exist. Moreover, even if they exist and no matter what power they may have, the saint, or he who is unfettered by the world, regards himself as superior to them. The stature of beings lies not in the extent of their power over things but in the extent of their progress along the way to salvation.[20]

It is true that, in at least some divisions of the Buddhist church,* the Buddha has come to be regarded as a kind of god. He has his temples and has become the object of a cult. But the cult is very simple, essentially limited to offerings of a few flowers and the veneration of relics or sacred images. It is little more than a commemorative cult. But further, assuming the term to be apposite, this *divinization* of the Buddha is peculiar to what has been called Northern Buddhism. "The Buddhists of the South," says Kern, "and the least advanced among the Buddhists of the North can be said, according to presently available evidence, to speak of the founder of their doctrine as if he were a man."[21] They probably do ascribe to the Buddha extraordinary powers, superior to those ordinary mortals possess; but it is a very old belief in India (and a belief widespread in many different religions) that a great saint is gifted with exceptional virtues.[22] Still, a saint is not a god, any more than a priest or a magician is, despite the superhuman faculties that are often ascribed to them. Besides, according to the best scholarly authority, this sort of theism and the complex mythology that ordinarily goes with it are no more than a derivative and deviant form of Buddhism. At first, the Buddha was not regarded as anything other than "the wisest of men."[23] "The conception of a Buddha who is other than a man who has reached the highest degree of holiness is," says Burnouf, "outside the circle of ideas that are the very founda-

*Here, as in the definition of religion (p. 44), Durkheim capitalizes the word "church."

[19]Barth [*Religions of India*], p. 109. "I am deeply convinced," says Burnouf as well, "that if Çâkya had not found around him a Pantheon full of the gods whose names I gave, he would have seen no need whatever to invent it" ([Eugene Bournouf], *Bouddhisme indien,* p. 119).

[20]Burnouf, *Bouddhisme indien,* p. 117.

[21]Kern, *Histoire du bouddhisme,* vol. I, p. 289.

[22]"The belief universally accepted in India that great holiness is necessarily accompanied by supernatural faculties, is the sole support that he (Çâkya) had to find in spirits" (Burnouf, *Bouddhisme indien,* p. 119).

[23]Ibid., p. 120.

tion of even the simple Sutras";[24] and as the same author adds elsewhere, "his humanity has remained a fact so uncontestably acknowledged by all that it did not occur to the myth makers, to whom miracles come very easily, to make a god out of him after his death."[25] Hence, one may ask whether he has ever reached the point of being completely stripped of human character and thus whether it would be proper to liken him to a god;[26] whatever the case is, it would be to a god of a very special nature, and whose role in no way resembles that of other divine personalities. A god is first of all a living being on whom man must count and on whom he can count; now, the Buddha has died, he has entered Nirvana, and he can do nothing more in the course of human events.[27]

Finally, and whatever else one may conclude about the divinity of the Buddha, the fact remains that this conception is wholly extraneous to what is truly fundamental in Buddhism. Buddhism consists first and foremost in the idea of salvation, and salvation only requires one to know and practice the right doctrine. Of course, that doctrine would not have been knowable if the Buddha had not come to reveal it; but once that revelation was made, the Buddha's work was done. From then on, he ceased to be a necessary factor in religious life. The practice of the Four Holy Truths would be possible even if the memory of the one who made them known was erased from memory.[28] Very different from this is Christianity, which is inconceivable without the idea of Christ ever present and his cult ever practiced; for it is through the ever-living Christ, daily sacrificed, that the community of the faithful goes on communicating with the supreme source of its spiritual life.[29]

[24]Ibid., p. 107.

[25]Ibid., p. 302.

[26]Kern makes this point in the following terms: "In certain respects, he is a man; in certain respects, he is not a man; in certain respects, he is neither one nor the other" (*Histoire du bouddhisme* vol. I, p. 290).

[27]"The idea that the divine head of the Community is not absent from among his people, but in reality remains among them as their master and king, in such a way that the cult is nothing other than the expression of the permanence of that common life—this idea is entirely foreign to Buddhists. Their own master is in Nirvana; if his faithful cried out to him he could not hear them" (Oldenberg, *Le Bouddha* [p. 368]).

[28]"In all its basic traits, the Buddhist doctrine could exist, just as it does in reality, even if the idea of Buddha remained wholly foreign to it" (Oldenberg, *Le Bouddha,* p. 322). And what is said of the historical Buddha also applies to all the mythological ones.

[29]See in this connection Max Müller, *Natural Religion* [London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1889], pp. 103ff., 190.

All the preceding applies equally to another great religion of India, Jainism. Additionally, the two doctrines hold practically the same conception of the world and of life. "Like the Buddhists," says M. Barth, "the Jainists are atheists. They reject the idea of a creator; for them, the world is eternal and they explicitly deny that there could exist a being perfect from all eternity." Like the Northern Buddhists, the Jainists, or at least certain of them, have nevertheless reverted to a sort of deism; in the inscriptions of the Deccan, one *Jinapati** is spoken of, a kind of supreme Jina who is called the first creator; but such language, says the same author, "conflicts with the most explicit statements of their most authoritative authors."[30]

Furthermore, this indifference to the divine is so developed in Buddhism and Jainism because the seed existed in the Brahmanism from which both religions derive. In at least certain of its forms, Brahmanic speculation led to "a frankly materialist and atheist explanation of the universe."[31] With the passage of time, the multiple deities that the peoples of India had learned to worship were more or less amalgamated into a kind of abstract and impersonal principal deity, the essence of all that exists. Man contains within himself this supreme reality, in which nothing of divine personhood remains; or rather, he is one with it, since nothing exists apart from it. Thus to find and unite with this reality, he does not have to search for support outside himself; all it takes is for him to focus on himself and meditate. Oldenburg says, "When Buddhism takes up the grand endeavor of imagining a world of salvation in which man saves himself, and of creating a religion without a god, Brahmanic speculation has already prepared the ground. The notion of divinity has gradually receded; the figures of the ancient gods dim, and slowly disappear. Far above the terrestrial world, Brahma sits enthroned in his eternal quiet, and only one person remains to take an active part in the great work of salvation: Man."[32] Note, then, that a considerable part of religious evolution has consisted of a gradual movement away from the ideas of spiritual being and divinity. Here are great religions in which invocations, propitiations, sacrifices, and prayers properly so-called are far from dominant, and therefore do not exhibit the distinguishing mark by which, it is claimed, specifically religious phenomena are to be recognized.

*This term means "conquering lord" and, according to current scholarship, refers to a spiritual ideal, not to a creator. I am indebted to my colleague Douglas Brooks on this point.

[30]Barth, *Religions of India*, p. 146.

[31]Barth, ["Religions de l'Inde"] in *Encyclopédie des sciences religieuses* [Paris, Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1877–1882], vol. VI, p. 548.

[32]Oldenberg, *Le Bouddha* [p. 51].

But many rites that are wholly independent of any idea of gods or spiritual beings are found even in deistic religions. First of all, there are a multitude of prohibitions. For example, the Bible commands the woman to live in isolation for a definite period each month,[33] imposes similar isolation at the time of childbirth,[34] and forbids hitching a donkey and a horse together or wearing a garment in which hemp is mixed with linen.[35] It is impossible to see what role belief in Yahweh could have played in these prohibitions, for he is absent from all the relations thus prohibited and could hardly be interested in them. The same can be said for most of the dietary restrictions. Such restrictions are not peculiar to the Hebrews; in various forms, they are found in innumerable religions.

It is true that these rites are purely negative, but they are nonetheless religious. Furthermore, there are other rites that impose active and positive obligations upon the faithful and yet are of the same nature. They act on their own, and their efficacy does not depend upon any divine power; they mechanically bring about the effects that are their reason for being. They consist neither of prayers nor of offerings to a being on whose goodwill the anticipated result depends; instead, the result is achieved through the automatic operation of the ritual. Such is the case, for example, of sacrifice in Vedic religion. "Sacrifice," says M. Bergaigne, "exerts direct influence upon celestial phenomena";[36] it is all powerful by itself and without any divine influence. For instance, it is sacrifice that broke the doors of the cave where the auroras were imprisoned, and thus did daylight erupt into the world.[37] Likewise, it was appropriate hymns that acted directly to make the waters of the sky flow on earth—and *this despite the gods.*[38] Certain ascetic practices are equally efficacious. Consider this: "Sacrifice is so much the principle, par ex-

[33]I Sam. 21, 6. [This is in fact about the sexual purity of men. Trans.]

[34]Lev. 12.

[35]Deut. 12, 10–11. [These verses are in fact about establishing a place for God's name to dwell in. They go on to discuss sacrifices. Trans.]

[36]Abel Bergaigne, *La Religion védique [d'après les hymnes du Rig Véda,* 4 vols. Paris, F. Vieweg, 1878–1897], vol. I, p. 22.

[37]Ibid., p. 133.

[38]M. Bergaigne writes, "No text better reveals the inner meaning of magical action by man upon the waters of the sky than Verse X, 32, 7, in which that belief is expressed in general terms as applicable to the man of today as to his real or mythological ancestors. The ignorant man queried the savant; taught by the savant, he acts, and therein lies the benefit of his teaching, he conquers the rush of the rapids." Ibid. (p. 137).

cellence, that not only the origin of men but even that of the gods has been ascribed to it. Such an idea may very well seem strange. It is explicable, however, as one ultimate consequence, among others, of the idea that sacrifice is all powerful."[39] Thus, the whole first part of M. Bergaigne's work deals only with those sacrifices in which the deities play no role.

This fact is not peculiar to Vedic religion; to the contrary, it is quite widespread. In any cult, there are practices that act by themselves, by a virtue that is their own, and without any god's stepping in between the individual who performs the rite and the object sought. When the Jew stirred the air at the Feast of the Tabernacles by shaking willow branches in a certain rhythm, it was to make the wind blow and the rain fall; the belief was that the rite produced the desired result automatically, provided it was correctly performed.[40] It is this, by the way, that explains the primary importance that nearly all cults give to the physical aspect of ceremonies. This religious formalism (probably the earliest form of legal formalism) arises from the fact that, having in and of themselves the source of their efficacy, the formulas to be pronounced and the movements to be executed would lose efficacy if they were not exactly the same as those that had already proved successful.

Thus there are rites without gods, and indeed rites from which gods derive. Not all religious virtues emanate from divine personalities, and there are cult ties other than those that unite man with a deity. Thus, religion is broader than the idea of gods or spirits and so cannot be defined exclusively in those terms.

III

With these definitions set aside, let us now see how we can approach the problem.

First, let us note that, in all these formulas, scholars have been trying to express the nature of religion as a whole. Although religion is a whole composed of parts—a more or less complex system of myths, dogmas, rites, and ceremonies—they operate as if it formed a kind of indivisible entity. Since a whole can be defined only in relationship to the parts that comprise it, a better method is to try to characterize the elementary phenomena from which any religion results, and then characterize the system produced by their

[39]Ibid., p. 139.

[40]Other examples are to be found in [Henri] Hubert, "Magia," in *Dictionnaire des antiquités,* vol. VI, p. 1509 [Paris, Hachette, 1877–1918].

union. This method is all the more indispensable in view of the fact that there are religious phenomena that do not fall under the jurisdiction of any particular religion. Those that form the subject matter of folklore do not. In general, these phenomena are jumbled survivals, the remnants of extinct religions; but there are some as well that are formed spontaneously under the influence of local causes. In Europe, Christianity undertook to absorb and assimilate them; it imprinted them with Christian coloration. Nonetheless, there are many that have persisted until recently or that still persist more or less autonomously—festivals of the maypole, the summer solstice, carnival, assorted beliefs about genies and local demons, and so on. Although the religious character of these phenomena is receding more and more, their religious importance is still such that they have permitted Mannhardt* and his school to rejuvenate the science of religions. A definition of religion that did not take them into account would not encompass all that is religious.

Religious phenomena fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are particular modes of action. Between these two categories of phenomena lies all that separates thinking from doing.

The rites can be distinguished from other human practices—for example, moral practices—only by the special nature of their object. Like a rite, a moral rule prescribes ways of behaving to us, but those ways of behaving address objects of a different kind. It is the object of the rite that must be characterized, in order to characterize the rite itself. The special nature of that object is expressed in the belief. Therefore, only after having defined the belief can we define the rite.

Whether simple or complex, all known religious beliefs display a common feature: They presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes—two opposite genera—that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words *profane* and *sacred* translate fairly well. The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane—such is the distinctive trait of religious thought. Beliefs, myths, dogmas, and legends are either representations or systems of representations that express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers attributed to them, their history, and their relationships with one another as well as with profane things. Sacred things are not

*Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831–1880). Influenced by Jakob Grimm and borrowing methods from the new disciplines of geology and archaeology, he pioneered the scientific study of oral tradition in Germany. James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* drew on Mannhardt's European material.

simply those personal beings that are called gods or spirits. A rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word anything, can be sacred. A rite can have sacredness; indeed there is no rite that does not have it to some degree. There are words, phrases, and formulas that can be said only by consecrated personages; there are gestures and movements that cannot be executed by just anyone. If Vedic sacrifice has had such great efficacy—if, indeed, sacrifice was far from being a method of gaining the gods' favor but, according to mythology, actually generated the gods—that is because the virtue it possessed was comparable to that of the most sacred beings. The circle of sacred objects cannot be fixed once and for all; its scope can vary infinitely from one religion to another. What makes Buddhism a religion is that, in the absence of gods, it accepts the existence of sacred things, namely, the Four Noble Truths and the practices that are derived from them.[41]

But I have confined myself thus far to enumerating various sacred things as examples: I must now indicate the general characteristics by which they are distinguished from profane things.

One might be tempted to define sacred things by the rank that is ordinarily assigned to them in the hierarchy of beings. They tend to be regarded as superior in dignity and power to profane things, and particularly to man, in no way sacred when he is only a man. Indeed, he is portrayed as occupying a rank inferior to and dependent upon them. While that portrayal is certainly not without truth, nothing about it is truly characteristic of the sacred. Subordination of one thing to another is not enough to make one sacred and the other not. Slaves are subordinate to their masters, subjects to their king, soldiers to their leaders, lower classes to ruling classes, the miser to his gold, and the power seeker to the power holders. If a man is sometimes said to have the religion of beings or things in which he recognizes an eminent value and a kind of superiority to him, it is obvious that, in all such cases, the word is taken in a metaphorical sense, and there is nothing in those relations that is religious in a strict sense.[42]

On the other hand, we should bear in mind that there are things with which man feels relatively at ease, even though they are sacred to the highest degree. An amulet has sacredness, and yet there is nothing extraordinary about the respect it inspires. Even face to face with his gods, man is not always in such a marked state of inferiority, for he very often uses physical coercion on them to get what he wants. He beats the fetish when he is

[41]Not to mention the sage or the saint who practices these truths, and who is for this reason sacred.

[42]This is not to say that the relations cannot take on a religious character, but that they do not necessarily.

displeased, only to be reconciled with it if, in the end, it becomes more amenable to the wishes of its worshipper.[43] To get rain, stones are thrown into the spring or the sacred lake where the god of the rain is presumed to reside; it is believed that he is forced by this means to come out and show himself.[44] Furthermore, while it is true that man is a dependent of his gods, this dependence is mutual. The gods also need man; without offerings and sacrifices, they would die. I will have occasion to show that this dependence of gods on their faithful is found even in the most idealistic* religions.

However, if the criterion of a purely hierarchical distinction is at once too general and too imprecise, nothing but their heterogeneity is left to define the relation between the sacred and the profane. But what makes this heterogeneity sufficient to characterize that classification of things and to distinguish it from any other is that it has a very particular feature: *It is absolute.* In the history of human thought, there is no other example of two categories of things as profoundly differentiated or as radically opposed to one another. The traditional opposition between good and evil is nothing beside this one: Good and evil are two opposed species of the same genus, namely morals, just as health and illness are nothing more than two different aspects of the same order of facts, life; by contrast, the sacred and the profane are always and everywhere conceived by the human intellect as separate genera, as two worlds with nothing in common. The energies at play in one are not merely those encountered in the other, but raised to a higher degree; they are different in kind. This opposition has been conceived differently in different religions. Here, localizing the two kinds of things in different regions of the physical universe has appeared sufficient to separate them; there, the sacred is thrown into an ideal and transcendent milieu, while the residuum is abandoned as the property of the material world. But while the forms of the contrast are variable,[45] the fact of it is universal.

This is not to say that a being can never pass from one of these worlds to the other. But when this passage occurs, the manner in which it occurs

*For the meaning of "idealistic," bear in mind Durkheim's contrast (above, p. 2) between religions that contain more concepts and fewer sensations and images.

[43][Fritz] Schultze, [*Der*] *Fetichismus* [*Ein Beitrag zur Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte,* Leipzig, C. Wilfferodt, 1871], p. 129.

[44]Examples of these customs will be found in [James George] Frazer, *Golden Bough,* 2d ed., vol. I [New York, Macmillan, 1894], pp. 81ff.

[45]The conception according to which the profane is opposed to the sacred as the rational is to the irrational; the intelligible to the mysterious, is only one of the forms in which this opposition is expressed. Science, once constituted, has taken on a profane character, especially in the eyes of the Christian religions; in consequence, it has seemed that science could not be applied to sacred things.

demonstrates the fundamental duality of the two realms, for it implies a true metamorphosis. Rites of initiation, which are practiced by a great many peoples, demonstrate this especially well. Initiation is a long series of rites to introduce the young man into religious life. For the first time, he comes out of the purely profane world, where he has passed his childhood, and enters into the circle of sacred things. This change of status is conceived not as a mere development of preexisting seeds but as a transformation *totius substantiae.** At that moment, the young man is said to die, and the existence of the particular person he was, to cease—instantaneously to be replaced by another. He is born again in a new form. Appropriate ceremonies are held to bring about the death and the rebirth, which are taken not merely in a symbolic sense but literally.[46] Is this not proof that there is a rupture between the profane being that he was and the religious being that he becomes?

Indeed, this heterogeneity is such that it degenerates into real antagonism. The two worlds are conceived of not only as separate but also as hostile and jealous rivals. Since the condition of belonging fully to one is fully to have left the other, man is exhorted to retire completely from the profane in order to live an exclusively religious life. From thence comes monasticism, which artificially organizes a milieu that is apart from, outside of, and closed to the natural milieu where ordinary men live a secular life, and that tends almost to be its antagonist. From thence as well comes mystic asceticism, which seeks to uproot all that may remain of man's attachment to the world. Finally, from thence come all forms of religious suicide, the crowning logical step of this asceticism, since the only means of escaping profane life fully and finally is escaping life altogether.

The opposition of these two genera is expressed outwardly by a visible sign that permits ready recognition of this very special classification, wherever it exists. The mind experiences deep repugnance about mingling, even simple contact, between the corresponding things, because the notion of the sacred is always and everywhere separate from the notion of the profane in man's mind, and because we imagine a kind of logical void between them. The state of dissociation in which the ideas are found in consciousness is too strongly contradicted by such mingling, or even by their being too close to

*Of the whole essence.

[46]See James George Frazer, "On Some Ceremonies of the Central Australian Tribes," in *AAAS* [Melbourne, Victoria, published by the association], 1901 [vols. VIII–IX], pp. 313ff. The concept is, moreover, very common. In India, mere participation in the sacrificial act has the same effects; the sacrificer, by the very fact of entering into the circle of sacred things, changes personality. (See Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur [la nature et fonction du] sacrifice," *AS,* vol. II [1897], p. 101.)

one another. The sacred thing is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity. To be sure, this prohibition cannot go so far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible, for if the profane could in no way enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would be of no use. This placing in relationship in itself is always a delicate operation that requires precautions and a more or less complex initiation.[47] Yet such an operation is impossible if the profane does not lose its specific traits, and if it does not become sacred itself in some measure and to some degree. The two genera cannot, at the same time, both come close to one another and remain what they were.

Now we have a first criterion of religious beliefs. No doubt, within these two fundamental genera, there are secondary species that are themselves more or less incompatible with each other.[48] But characteristically, the religious phenomenon is such that it always assumes a bipartite division of the universe, known and knowable, into two genera that include all that exists but radically exclude one another. Sacred things are things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are those things to which the prohibitions are applied and that must keep at a distance from what is sacred. Religious beliefs are those representations that express the nature of sacred things and the relations they have with other sacred things or with profane things. Finally, rites are rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things.

When a certain number of sacred things have relations of coordination and subordination with one another, so as to form a system that has a certain coherence and does not belong to any other system of the same sort, then the beliefs and rites, taken together, constitute a religion. By this definition, a religion is not necessarily contained within a single idea and does not derive from a single principle that may vary with the circumstances it deals with, while remaining basically the same everywhere. Instead, it is a whole formed of separate and relatively distinct parts. Each homogeneous group of sacred things, or indeed each sacred thing of any importance, constitutes an organizational center around which gravitates a set of beliefs and rites, a cult of its own. There is no religion, however unified it may be, that does not acknowledge a plurality of sacred things. Even Christianity, at least in its Catholic form, accepts the Virgin, the angels, the saints, the souls of the dead, etc.—

[47]See what I say about initiation on p. 37, above.

[48]Later I will show how, for example, certain species of sacred things between which there is incompatibility exclude one another as the sacred excludes the profane (Bk.III, chap.5, §4).

above and beyond the divine personality (who, besides, is both three and one). As a rule, furthermore, religion is not merely a single cult either but is made up of a system of cults that possess a certain autonomy. This autonomy is also variable. Sometimes the cults are ranked and subordinated to some dominant cult into which they are eventually absorbed; but sometimes as well they simply exist side by side in confederation. The religion to be studied in this book will provide an example of this confederate organization.

At the same time, we can explain why groups of religious phenomena that belong to no constituted religion can exist: because they are not or are no longer integrated into a religious system. If, for specific reasons, one of those cults just mentioned should manage to survive while the whole to which it belonged has disappeared, it will survive only in fragments. This is what has happened to so many agrarian cults that live on in folklore. In certain cases, what persists in that form is not even a cult, but a mere ceremony or a particular rite.[49]

Although this definition is merely preliminary, it indicates the terms in which the problem that dominates the science of religions must be posed. If sacred beings are believed to be distinguished from the others solely by the greater intensity of the powers attributed to them, the question of how men could have imagined them is rather simple: Nothing more is needed than to identify those forces that, through their exceptional energy, have managed to impress the human mind forcefully enough to inspire religious feelings. But if, as I have tried to establish, sacred things are different in nature from profane things, if they are different in their essence, the problem is far more complex. In that case, one must ask what led man to see the world as two heterogeneous and incomparable worlds, even though nothing in sense experience seems likely to have suggested the idea of such a radical duality.

IV

Even so, this definition is not yet complete, for it fits equally well two orders of things that must be distinguished even though they are akin: magic and religion.

Magic, too, is made up of beliefs and rites. Like religion, it has its own myths and dogmas, but these are less well developed, probably because, given its pursuit of technical and utilitarian ends, magic does not waste time in pure speculation. Magic also has its ceremonies, sacrifices, purifications, prayers,

[49]This is the case, for example, of certain marriage and funeral rites.

songs, and dances. Those beings whom the magician invokes and the forces he puts to work are not only of the same nature as the forces addressed by religion but very often are the same forces. In the most primitive societies, the souls of the dead are in essence sacred things and objects of religious rites, but at the same time, they have played a major role in magic. In Australia[50] as well as in Melanesia,[51] in ancient Greece as well as among Christian peoples,[52] the souls, bones, and hair of the dead figure among the tools most often used by the magician. Demons are also a common instrument of magical influence. Now, demons are also surrounded by prohibitions; they too are separated and live in a world apart. Indeed, it is often difficult to distinguish them from gods proper.[53] Besides, even in Christianity, is not the devil a fallen god? And apart from his origins, does he not have a religious character, simply because the hell of which he is the keeper is an indispensable part in the machinery of the Christian religion? The magician can invoke regular and official deities. Sometimes these are gods of a foreign people: For example, the Greek magicians called upon Egyptian, Assyrian, or Jewish gods. Sometimes they are even national gods: Hecate and Diana were objects of a magic cult. The Virgin, the Christ, and the saints were used in the same manner by Christian magicians.[54]

Must we therefore say that magic cannot be rigorously differentiated from religion—that magic is full of religion and religion full of magic and, consequently, that it is impossible to separate them and define the one without the other? What makes that thesis hard to sustain is the marked repugnance of religion for magic and the hostility of magic to religion in return. Magic takes a kind of professional pleasure in profaning holy things,[55] inverting religious ceremonies in its rites.[56] On the other hand, while religion has not always condemned and prohibited magic rites, it has generally re-

[50]See [Sir Baldwin] Spencer and [Francis James] Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* [London, Macmillan, 1889], pp. 534ff., and *Northern Tribes of Central Australia* [London, Macmillan, 1904], p. 463; [Alfred William] Howitt, *Native Tribes of South East Australia* [London, Macmillan, 1904], pp. 359–361.

[51]See [Robert Henry] Codrington, *The Melanesians* [*Studies in Their Anthropology and Folklore,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1891], chap. 12.

[52]See Hubert, "Magia," in *Dictionnaire des antiquités.*

[53]For example, in Melanesia the *tindalo* is a spirit that is sometimes religious and sometimes magical (Codrington, *The Melanesians,* pp. 125ff., 194ff.).

[54]See Hubert and Mauss, "Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie," *AS,* vol. VII [1904], pp. 83–84.

[55]For example, the Host is profaned in the Black Mass.

[56]See Hubert, "Magia," in *Dictionnaire des antiquités.*

garded them with disfavor. As messieurs Hubert and Mauss point out, there is something inherently antireligious about the maneuvers of the magician.[57] So it is difficult for these two institutions not to oppose one another at some point, whatever the relations between them. Since my intention is to limit my research to religion and stop where magic begins, discovering what distinguishes them is all the more important.

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

Religious beliefs proper are always shared by a definite group that professes them and that practices the corresponding rites. Not only are they individually accepted by all members of that group, but they also belong to the group and unify it. The individuals who comprise the group feel joined to one another by the fact of common faith. A society whose members are united because they imagine the sacred world and its relations with the profane world in the same way, and because they translate this common representation into identical practices, is what is called a Church.* In history we do not find religion without Church. Sometimes the Church is narrowly national; sometimes it extends beyond frontiers; sometimes it encompasses an entire people (Rome, Athens, the Hebrews); sometimes it encompasses only a fraction (Christian denominations since the coming of Protestantism); sometimes it is led by a body of priests; sometimes it is more or less without any official directing body.[58] But wherever we observe religious life, it has a definite group as its basis. Even so-called private cults, like the domestic cult or a corporate cult, satisfy this condition: They are always celebrated by a group, the family or the corporation. And, furthermore, even these private religions often are merely special forms of a broader religion that embraces the totality of life.[59] These small Churches are in reality only chapels in a larger Church and, because of this very scope, deserve all the more to be called by that name.[60]

*Durkheim capitalizes this term.

[57]Hubert and Mauss, "Esquisse," p. 19.

[58]Certainly it is rare for each ceremony not to have its director at the moment it is conducted; even in the most crudely organized societies, there generally are men designated, due to the importance of their social role, to exercise a directive influence upon religious life (for example, the heads of local groups in certain Australian societies). But this attribution of functions is nevertheless very loose.

[59]In Athens, the gods addressed by the domestic cult are only specialized forms of the gods of the City (*Ζεὺς κτήσιος, Ζεὺς ἑρκεῖος*). [Zeus, protector of property, Zeus, the household god. Trans.] Similarly, in the Middle Ages, the patrons of brotherhoods are saints of the calendar.

[60]For the name of Church ordinarily applies only to a group whose common beliefs refer to a sphere of less specialized things.

Magic is an entirely different matter. Granted, magic beliefs are never without a certain currency. They are often widespread among broad strata of the population, and there are even peoples where they count no fewer active followers than religion proper. But they do not bind men who believe in them to one another and unite them into the same group, living the same life. *There is no Church of magic.* Between the magician and the individuals who consult him, there are no durable ties that make them members of a single moral body, comparable to the ties that join the faithful of the same god or the adherents of the same cult. The magician has a clientele, not a Church, and his clients may have no mutual relations, and may even be unknown to one another. Indeed, the relations they have with him are generally accidental and transient, analogous to those of a sick man with his doctor. The official and public character with which the magician is sometimes invested makes no difference. That he functions in broad daylight does not join him in a more regular and lasting manner with those who make use of his services.

It is true that, in certain cases, magicians form a society among themselves. They meet more or less periodically to celebrate certain rites in common in some instances; the place held by witches' meetings in European folklore is well known. But these associations are not at all indispensable for the functioning of magic. Indeed, they are rare and rather exceptional. To practice his art, the magician has no need whatever to congregate with his peers. He is more often a loner. In general, far from seeking company, he flees it. "He stands aloof, even from his colleagues."[61] By contrast, religion is inseparable from the idea of Church. In this first regard, there is already a fundamental difference between magic and religion. Furthermore, and above all, when magic societies of this sort are formed, they never encompass all the adherents of magic. Far from it. They encompass only the magicians. Excluded from them are the laity, as it were—that is, those for whose benefit the rites are conducted, which is to say those who are the adherents of regular cults. Now, the magician is to magic what the priest is to religion. But a college of priests is no more a religion than a religious congregation that worships a certain saint in the shadows of the cloister is a private cult. A Church is not simply a priestly brotherhood; it is a moral community* made up of all the faithful, both laity and priests. Magic ordinarily has no community of this sort.[62]

*Note the first use in this book of this fundamentally important Durkheimian concept which can also be thought of as "imagined community." See pp. xxii–xxxiii, xiv.

[61]Hubert and Mauss, "Esquisse," p. 18.

[62][William] Robertson Smith had already shown that magic is opposed to religion as the individual is to the social ([*Lectures on*] *the Religion of the Semites,* 2d ed. [London, A. & C. Black, 1894], pp. 264–265).

But if one includes the notion of Church in the definition of religion, does one not by the same stroke exclude the individual religions that the individual institutes for himself and celebrates for himself alone? There is scarcely any society in which this is not to be found. As will be seen below, every Ojibway has his personal *manitou* that he chooses himself and to which he bears specific religious obligations; the Melanesian of the Banks Islands has his *tamaniu;*[63] the Roman has his *genius;*[64] the Christian has his patron saint and his guardian angel, and so forth. All these cults seem, by definition, to be independent of the group. And not only are these individual religions very common throughout history, but some people today pose the question whether such religions are not destined to become the dominant form of religious life—whether a day will not come when the only cult will be the one that each person freely practices in his innermost self.[65]

But, let us put aside these speculations about the future for a moment. If we confine our discussion to religions as they are in the present and as they have been in the past, it becomes obvious that these individual cults are not distinct and autonomous religious systems but simply aspects of the religion common to the whole Church of which the individuals are part. The patron saint of the Christian is chosen from the official list of saints recognized by the Catholic Church, and there are canonical laws that prescribe how each believer must conduct this private cult. In the same way, the idea that every man necessarily has a protective genie is, in different forms, at the basis of a large number of American religions, as well as of Roman religion (to cite only these two examples). As will be seen below, that idea is tightly bound up with the idea of soul, and the idea of soul is not among those things that can be left entirely to individual choice. In a word, it is the Church of which he is a member that teaches the individual what these personal gods are, what their role is, how he must enter into relations with them, and how he must honor them. When one analyzes the doctrines of that Church systematically, sooner or later one comes across the doctrines that concern these special cults. Thus there are not two religions of different types, turned in opposite

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Further, in thus differentiating magic from religion, I do not mean to set up a radical discontinuity between them. The frontiers between these two domains are often blurred.

[63][Robert Henry] Codrington, "Notes on the Customs of Mota, Bank Islands in *RSI,* vol. XVI [1880], p. 136.

[64][Augusto] Negrioli, *Dei Genii presso i Romani,* [Bologna, Ditto Nicola Zanichelli, 1900].

[65]This is the conclusion at which [Herbert] Spencer arrives in his *Ecclesiastical Institutions* [Part VI of *The Principles of Sociology,* New York, D. Appleton, 1886], chap. 16. It is also the conclusion of [Auguste] Sabatier, in his *Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion d'après la Psychologie et l'Histoire,* [Paris, Fischbacher, 1897], and that of the entire school to which he belongs.

directions, but the same ideas and principles applied in both cases—here, to circumstances that concern the group as a whole, and there, to the life of the individual. Indeed, this unity is so close that, among certain peoples,[66] the ceremonies during which the believer first enters into communication with his protective genie are combined with rites whose public character is incontestable, namely, rites of initiation.[67]

What remains are the present-day aspirations toward a religion that would consist entirely of interior and subjective states and be freely constructed by each one of us. But no matter how real those aspirations, they cannot affect our definition: This definition can be applied only to real, accomplished facts, not to uncertain possibilities. Religions can be defined as they are now or as they have been, not as they may be tending more or less vaguely to become. It is possible that this religious individualism is destined to become fact; but to be able to say in what measure, we must first know what religion is, of what elements it is made, from what causes it results, and what function it performs—all questions whose answers cannot be preordained, for we have not crossed the threshold of research. Only at the end of this study will I try to look into the future.

We arrive thus at the following definition: *A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.* The second element thus holds a place in my definition that is no less essential than the first: In showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from the idea of a Church, it conveys the notion that religion must be an eminently collective thing.[68]

[66]Among numerous Indian peoples of North America, in particular.

[67]However, that factual point does not settle the question of whether external and public religion is anything other than the development of an interior and personal religion that would be the primitive phenomenon, or whether, on the other hand, the personal religion is the extension, inside individual consciousnesses, of the exterior one. The problem will be taken up directly below (Bk. II, chap. 5, §2. Cf. Bk. II, chap. 6 and Bk. II, chap. 7, §1). For now I merely note that the individual cult presents itself to the observer as an element and an appendage of the collective cult.

[68]It is there that my definition picks up the one I proposed some time ago in the *Année sociologique.* In that work, I defined religious beliefs exclusively by their obligatory character; but that obligation evidently arises, as I showed, from the fact that those beliefs belong to a group that imposes them on its members. Thus the two definitions partly overlap. If I have thought it necessary to propose a new one, it is because the first was too formal and went too far in downplaying the content of religious representations. In the discussions that follow, we will see the point of having placed in evidence immediately what is characteristic of this content. In addition, if the imperative character is indeed a distinctive feature of religious beliefs, it has infinite gradations; consequently, it is not easily perceptible in some cases. There arise difficulties and troublesome questions that are avoided if this criterion is replaced by the one I have used above.