



Émile Durkheim

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life

A new translation by Carol Cosman

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

DAVID ÉMILE DURKHEIM (1858–1917), the descendant of a long line of rabbis, was born in Lorraine, France. He was raised in the warmth and security of a tightly knit Jewish community, where he was nurtured in the complex, often conflicting values of France's Third Republic—liberty, equality, and fellowship. Much of Durkheim's career as a sociologist, educator, and moral philosopher can be described as an effort to articulate and promote the dignity and rights of the individual in a moral idiom of social traditions and commitment to a common good.

Educated at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, Durkheim taught at the University of Bordeaux and the Sorbonne. His publications include *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897), and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), as well as hundreds of articles and book reviews. In 1898, Durkheim founded the journal *L'Année sociologique*, the most significant collaborative venture in the history of sociology. A conspicuous feature of the journal, and of Durkheim's career, is a preoccupation with religion. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is the culmination of Durkheim's religious investigations, and of his thirty-year authorship.

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ÉMILE DURKHEIM

*The Elementary Forms of
Religious Life*



Translated by

CAROL COSMAN

Abridged with an Introduction and Notes by

MARK S. CLADIS

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INTRODUCTION

IMAGINE that for some time now you have understood religion as collective beliefs and practices that shape a society's moral identity. You have become convinced, as well, that in modern, democratic societies religion plays an increasingly minor role. You are eager, then, to discover what supplies a sense of belonging and moral scaffolding in modern societies. This venture is urgent: if religion provided moral solidarity in the past, and if religion has been in a continuous state of decline, what will take its place in the future? And what of today?

Religion and its relation to society continue to dominate your thought. You have argued that religion pertains to the shared beliefs and practices of traditional communities, and you have also ardently criticized the view that modern society neither has nor needs such social forces to link together its members. In this view, modern society is best described as a group of disparate individuals pursuing private projects, protected by law. Collective beliefs and practices are largely a phenomenon of the past; they are inappropriate for today and would present obstacles to the individual's happiness. You, in contrast, have recently become convinced that as shared traditions and communities wane, human sorrows multiply.

Now imagine this: a fellow citizen—a French Jew named Dreyfus—is unjustly accused and convicted of high treason. It is clear to you and others that he has been scapegoated by military and government officials: his rights have been betrayed. Soon, many rally to his defence. With marches in the street and flags and speeches in the air, your society is stirred and the social ideals of liberty and justice are renewed. You witness a moral community being forged: sacred rites and beliefs clearly emerge. These, however, are not centred on the totems or gods of yesterday, but on the rights and dignity of the individual. You begin to realize that the elementary forms of religious life permeate not only traditional but modern societies as well. Although its tenets and rites have changed, its basic forms have not. Robust, collective beliefs and institutions still shape, move, and enliven us, though perhaps not in domains usually associated with religion. The political, economic, and even scientific

realms are infused with the religious. Individual rights, notions of economic fair play, and the spirit of free enquiry, for example, are charged with the sacred. You now have a powerful vocabulary for articulating the normative, communal aspects of modern, democratic societies—the vocabulary of religion.

If you have imagined the above, then you have grasped much about the work of Émile Durkheim. ‘If religion generated everything that is essential in society, this is because the idea of society is the soul of religion’ (p. 314). Durkheim made this claim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), arguably his most important book. He set himself the task of discovering the enduring source of human social identity and fellowship—*solidarité*. This led him to investigate what he considered to be the most simple form of documented religion—totemism among the Aborigines of Australia. He held as a scientific principle the belief that to understand a complex phenomenon one must begin by examining its simplest form. Yet on the first page, Durkheim stated clearly that apprehending Aboriginal religion is not in itself his principal aim, but is rather an avenue ‘to yield an understanding of the religious nature of man, by showing us an essential and permanent aspect of humanity’ (p. 3). After following Durkheim’s religious investigations as one might read a detective story, with clues placed here and there, one eventually discovers that this ‘permanent aspect of humanity’ is the human need and capacity to relate socially. Durkheim treated religion as authoritative yet dynamic social ideals, beliefs, and practices that shape a common perception of, and therefore life in, a society’s moral universe. One finds religion wherever public, normative concepts, symbols, or rites are employed. Religion, then, pervades traditional and modern—even postmodern—societies. The upshot of this, morally and epistemologically, is that human life is, in a significant sense, life together. This is Durkheim’s response, and challenge, to a long tradition of Cartesian, individualistic thought.

The central thesis of *The Elementary Forms* is as profound as it is simple. Totemism, which features most clearly the elementary form of religious life, reveals that the totem—or what one might think of as divinity—is in fact society itself conceived symbolically. ‘If the totem is both the symbol of god and of society, are these not one and the same? . . . The god of the clan . . . must therefore be the clan itself, but transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the

plant or animal species that serve as totems' (p. 154). If the thesis is simple, the arguments that Durkheim forged to defend it and the conclusions he derived from it are rich and nuanced. This accounts for why the book has enthralled generations of scholars from a variety of fields. It has perhaps spawned a greater range of questions and research projects than any other work published in its day. From the political philosophers' debate over the nature of individual rights to the anthropologists' pursuit of the origins of society; from the sociologists' account of epistemology and civic religion to religious studies scholars' analysis of ritual, *The Elementary Forms* continues to inform our reflection and conversations.

The book, then, can be and has been read in many ways: as a monograph on Australian totemism, a general theory of religion, an epistemology, a sociology of religion, a contribution to the hermeneutics of suspicion and interpretative theory, an account of social dynamics and solidarity. We show fidelity to the book by allowing it to speak to its different audiences; we dishonour it when, territorially, we surround it by rigid disciplinary boundaries. By putting *The Elementary Forms* to many uses we acknowledge that Durkheim did likewise with his Australian material. Its mark as a classic is its ability to speak in more than one voice and to more than one generation.

Outline of Durkheim's Life and Career

It is commonly said that Durkheim died of a broken heart. This is not mere sentimentalism. His world was constructed entirely of colleagues, students, family, and service to France. By 1917, the year of his death, this world had been fiercely assailed. The Great War took the lives of many of Durkheim's closest colleagues and students, and finally, in 1916, that of his son. Soon after learning of his son's fate, Durkheim—a Jew with a German-sounding name—was cruelly (and, one might say, absurdly) accused of being a German sympathizer. Not long before these tragic events, Durkheim had reported that he was 'working like a young man', consumed by his prodigious contribution to France's war effort.¹ Shortly after these events, however, his health quickly declined and he died of a stroke.

Durkheim was born in 1858 in Lorraine and was given the names

¹ Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim: His Life and Work* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), 554.

David Émile. The names are telling. 'David' signifies his Jewish heritage. The descendant of a long line of rabbis, Durkheim was raised in the warmth and security of a tightly knit Jewish community, and there he was nurtured in communal values. 'Émile' points to his French allegiance. The Jews in Alsace-Lorraine were ardent French patriots, especially after France was defeated by the Germans in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. Parents hoped that their children could make a vital contribution to the Third Republic of France. Such a contribution, however, usually entailed that the youth leave their secure communities and move to Paris—the heart of France, the place of opportunity and excitement, of loneliness and alienation. Durkheim, consequently, received the ambiguous message: to serve the common good, leave behind your community. To this would soon be added: to champion the Republic, safeguard the rights and dignity of the individual. Early on, David Émile was exposed to the complex, often conflicting values of the Third Republic—liberty, equality, and fellowship.

In Paris he studied at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand and then, in 1879, at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure. Among his peers were Henri Bergson (who became a prominent philosopher and won the Nobel Prize in 1927) and Jean Jaurès (who became a historian and renowned French socialist); it has been suggested that they hastened Durkheim's 'painful break' from Judaism.² Although it is difficult to determine with precision the relation of Judaism to Durkheim's scholarly thought, there can be little doubt that his Jewish heritage remained an enduring influence. His rejection of individualistic definitions of religion and his identification of religion with moral community reflect this influence.³ Influence of a different kind that may have supported aspects of Judaism came from two prominent professors at the École, Charles Renouvier and Fustel de Coulanges. Renouvier, a neo-Kantian who stressed the science of morals, had attempted to connect individual autonomy and social solidarity. At every turn he placed—as would Durkheim—social justice over economic utility. Like Renouvier, de Coulanges also described his

² Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, 554.

³ For an excellent account of the relevance of Durkheim's Jewishness to his analysis of religion, see Deborah Dash Moore, 'David Émile Durkheim and the Jewish Response to Modernity', *Modern Judaism*, 6 (1986), 287–300. For a contrary, though also thoughtful, point of view, Ivan Strenski, *Durkheim and the Jews of France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

field, history, as a scientific discipline. Both Renouvier and de Coulanges nourished Durkheim's image of himself as a scientist. Yet in contrast to Renouvier, de Coulanges had underscored for the young Durkheim the significance of religion in the interpretation of a society's beliefs and institutions. Thus one finds similarities between *The Elementary Forms* and de Coulanges's *The Ancient City*—a study of Greek and Roman city-states that highlights their religious bases.

Durkheim graduated from the École in 1882 and, as was the custom, taught in *lycées*—secondary education—for three years in preparation for an academic post. By all accounts he was an inspiring, if rather serious, teacher. For the academic year 1885–6, Durkheim was awarded a grant to study and report on the state of philosophy and the social sciences in the German universities. This visit proved to be immensely important to Durkheim's subsequent thought. If such French influences as Rousseau, Saint-Simon, Comte, Renouvier, and de Coulanges shaped the questions Durkheim brought to Germany, the German social economists—the *Kathedersozialisten*—along with Kant and Wundt greatly informed many of his answers. Returning from Germany Durkheim married Louise Dreyfus (no relation to Captain Dreyfus) and assumed a teaching post in social science and education at the University of Bordeaux. There he enjoyed a happy, peaceful domestic life and a productive, demanding professional life. Even before his arrival in Bordeaux, Durkheim had acquired a warranted reputation for his moral exactitude and dedication to work. By the time he left Bordeaux fifteen years later to take up a post at the Sorbonne, Durkheim had written three of his four books—*The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), and *Suicide* (1897)—and hundreds of articles and reviews on subjects ranging from incest prohibition to war to anti-Semitism. At Bordeaux Durkheim founded the journal—indeed, a small Durkheimian moral community known as the 'little society'—*Année sociologique*. From 1898 to 1913, Durkheim and his close collaborators (among them Célestin Bouglé, Georges Davy, Paul Fauconnet, Henri Hubert, and Durkheim's nephew Marcel Mauss) elaborated their vision of the social sciences in the pages of the *Année sociologique*, and thereby created the most significant collaborative venture in the history of the field. It would be difficult to overestimate the scope and influence of the journal, or Durkheim's commitment

to it. A conspicuous feature of the journal is the high rank assigned to religious investigations.

When Durkheim returned to Paris in 1902 he was a well-known scholar with a tremendous sense of mission, and the Sorbonne—the most celebrated of France's universities—served as his pulpit. His mission was twofold: to establish further the new discipline of sociology; and to employ that discipline to assist the Third Republic in its difficult transition from community-based, religious education to national, secular education. Because the two goals were related, the stakes were high. Durkheim, among others, was convinced that the survival of France depended on establishing a national education, separate from the Church, that would communicate French ideals cast appropriately for the modern age. It is not often understood that from his first year at Bordeaux until his last at the Sorbonne, Durkheim regularly lectured on education, especially moral education. As a professor of education and sociology, Durkheim sought to strengthen the moral foundations of the Third Republic by equipping France's future educators with the spirit of science, the ideals of progressive liberalism, and love of the common good. In the process, he established French sociology and profoundly shaped social anthropology. If his death was hastened by disappointment and tragedy, his life's work survives, casting light on social problems old and new.

The Development of Durkheim's Thought on Religion

As Durkheim struggled to discover social arrangements suitable for modern, democratic societies, he increasingly turned his attention to religion. Well before the publication of his first book, *The Division of Labour in Society*, he viewed religion as the source of moral community in traditional society. Rejecting the view of Herbert Spencer, the English philosopher of society and evolution, who held that religion is an exercise in metaphysical speculation about the unknowable, Durkheim argued that religion is a form of authority and custom that powerfully links the individual to society. He came to hold that collective ideas and practices invariably acquire a religious character. However, he was initially reluctant to embrace such a collective phenomenon as religion to depict any salient aspect of modern society. In *The Division of Labour* he claimed that the

modern conception of the individual—a being with dignity and rights—has become ‘the object of a sort of religion . . . a common faith’. This is the first time Durkheim employs a religious idiom to describe a type of individualism. Yet within the very paragraph he recants, claiming that such individualism ‘does not constitute a truly social link’. Though modern individualism draws its strength from society ‘it is not to society that it binds us: it is to ourselves [as individuals]’.⁴

Yet as Durkheim persisted in his efforts to account for shared beliefs, practices, and institutions in modern social life, he was increasingly compelled to adopt a religious vocabulary. His eventual use of that vocabulary to characterize the moral *esprit* of modern, liberal society was the result of a radical shift in his understanding not of religion *per se*, but of modern society. Prior to the publication of *Suicide*, Durkheim was convinced that ‘if there is one truth that history has incontrovertibly settled, it is that religion extends over an ever diminishing area of social life’. His assumption was that in liberal society there are fewer and fewer beliefs and practices that ‘are both sufficiently collective and strong enough to assume a religious character’.⁵ Within a few years, however, Durkheim reversed his position. He came to believe that many modern, social institutions are religious in character, that is, they possess collective beliefs, values, and practices that profoundly shape moral identities.

This novel approach is exhibited, for instance, in 1899 when he noted that ‘between science and religious faith there are intermediate beliefs; these are common beliefs of all kinds, which are relevant to objects that are secular in appearance, such as the flag, one’s country, some form of political organization, some hero, or some historical event, etc.’ Many secular beliefs, he claimed, are ‘indistinguishable from religious beliefs proper’. Indistinguishable because modern France, like traditional societies, has a shared (even if ‘secular’) faith: ‘The mother country, the French Revolution, Joan of Arc, etc., are for us sacred things which we do not permit to be touched. Public opinion does not willingly permit one to contest the moral superiority of democracy, the reality of progress, and the idea of

⁴ Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1979), 122.

⁵ *Ibid.* 120.

equality.⁶ Earlier, religion had signified to Durkheim a moral solidarity found only in traditional society; now he perceived continuity between modern and traditional societies. Modern society, too, exhibits a religious character, but its common faith—its principal dogmas—expresses a religious content different from that of traditional societies.

Durkheim's religious interpretation of modern, liberal society was largely inspired by his involvement in the Dreyfus Affair and his reading of William Robertson Smith, the British anthropologist and biblical scholar. Robertson Smith claimed that religion pertains to the common good, not private interest; it expresses a community's public hopes and goals, thereby strengthening the social bonds between its members. 'Every act of worship', Smith had written, 'expressed the idea that man does not live for himself only but for his fellows, and that this partnership of social interests is the sphere over which the gods preside.'⁷ This passage and others similar to it enabled Durkheim to perceive his own work in a new light. Confirming Durkheim's thesis about the social character of the sacred, Robertson Smith had helped Durkheim formulate his new understanding of modern liberal society, especially France as it was arrested by the Dreyfus Affair—a public upheaval over Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish French officer who was unjustly convicted of treason by a military tribunal. By 1898 the Dreyfus case had become a popular and, in some cases, celebrated public affair—one of the most important in the history of France. Many believed that France's future as a democracy rested on the acquittal of Captain Dreyfus.

For some time now Durkheim had held that religion pertained to the shared beliefs and institutions of a traditional community. He also had been mounting a sustained critique of classical liberalism and its assumption that modern society is adequately understood as disparate individuals pursuing private projects. And now, during the height of the Dreyfus Affair, Durkheim perceived a public animation in France that was similar to what Robertson Smith had described as religion among the ancient Semites, 'the whole community stirred by a common emotion'. People took to the streets as flags were waved,

⁶ Émile Durkheim, 'De la définition des phénomènes religieux', *L'Année sociologique*, 2 (1899), 20.

⁷ William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1894; London: A. & C. Black Ltd., 1927), 264–5.

creeds professed, ideals renewed. In the midst of such effervescence, Durkheim discerned a common faith reaffirmed and extended. This faith—call it civic republicanism or moral individualism—affirmed the rights and dignity of the individual, and the conviction that one does not live for oneself alone but for one's fellows. In his Dreyfusard article 'Individuals and the Intellectuals' (1898) Durkheim argued that moral individualism—the beliefs and practices associated with social liberalism—'appears to those who aspire to it to be completely stamped with religiosity. . . . Whoever makes an attempt on a man's life, on a man's liberty . . . inspires in us a feeling of horror analogous in every way to that which the believer experiences when he sees his idol profaned.'⁸ Durkheim now possessed a powerful vocabulary, that of religion, for articulating the social dimensions of modern democratic society, of individuals in community. With it, he would go on to develop a social theory that articulated and promoted the sacred rights of the individual within the moral idiom of social traditions and commitment to a common good.

By 1899 Durkheim was describing religion as an interpretative key for understanding contemporary institutions:

Religion contains in itself from the very beginning . . . all the elements . . . which have given rise to the various manifestations of collective life. From myths and legends have issued forth science and poetry; from religious ornamentations and cult ceremonials have come the plastic arts; from ritual practice were born law and morals. One cannot understand our perception of the world, . . . of life, if one does not know the religious beliefs which are their primordial forms.⁹

Regardless of what subject Durkheim was investigating—morality, law, property, education, epistemology—religion now played a central explanatory role. Indeed, as one of Durkheim's colleagues, Paul Lapie, had murmured, 'Basically, Durkheim is explaining everything . . . by religion.'¹⁰ Durkheim continued his investigations of the religious origin and character of society—both traditional and modern—and these investigations culminated in 1912 in *The Elementary Forms*. With its publication, Durkheim the unbeliever

⁸ *Émile Durkheim on Morality and Society*, ed. Robert Bellah (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 46.

⁹ Durkheim, *L'Année sociologique*, 2 (1899), p. ii. Cited in W. S. F. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 74.

¹⁰ Cited in Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion*, 75.

produced one of the most provocative studies in religion: a religious theory of society and a social theory of religion.

The Elementary Forms

Durkheim's interest in the scientific study of religion was far from unique among his generation. Indeed, no generation before or since Durkheim's showed more interest in it. Sigmund Freud, James Frazer, William James, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Max Müller, Herbert Spencer, E. B. Tylor, and Max Weber: these and many others explored the origin and nature of religion with the tools of 'the scientist'. Especially acute was interest in what was then called primitive religion. Durkheim was thoroughly acquainted with the contemporary ethnographic material, though much of *The Elementary Forms* utilized what, even by 1912, had become the somewhat dated work of Spencer and Gillen. Moreover, since 1912, the reliability of many of Durkheim's other ethnographic sources has been challenged. Indeed, the very idea of totemism has been questioned. This, however, ought not to dishearten the reader. The value and profundity of Durkheim's theory of religion and society have persisted even as the material of its so-called empirical basis has eroded.

To discover the elementary forms of religious life, Durkheim proposed his 'one well-made experiment': a detailed analysis of the simplest well-known religion—Australian totemism. He held that all religions possess a similar character, yet in order to discern clearly these universal religious elements, one must go back behind the centuries of accrued embellishment and variation—diverse theologies and rituals—that mark today's major world religions. Simple religions, in which 'everything is reduced to what is indispensable' (p. 8), would allow one, Durkheim held, to discover the constituent elements of religion, and these, in turn, would help one understand and explain religion. Again, however, we need to keep in mind Durkheim's ultimate goal: to uncover the universal character of religious life in order to disclose an essential, enduring aspect of social life. The belief that the explanation of complex human phenomena requires the examination of their simpler, earlier forms reflects the prevailing ideology of nineteenth-century evolutionary thought. Although Durkheim rarely deprecated simple religions—he claimed that 'these religions are no less worthy than others'

(p. 5)—he did hold that from the primitive religions in the past spring the more complex religions of the present. And although he refrained from detailing evolutionary schemes that encompassed a multiplicity of cultures from past to present, he did believe that, at least early on, societies passed through distinct, predictable stages. Today one may well doubt that, as a rule, simple societies produce the simplest religions and that there are determinate stages through which today's major world religions have passed. Yet the value of *The Elementary Forms* transcends its evolutionary ideology; moreover, anthropologists today still find in it important clues in their search for the origins of religion and hence society.

The structure of Durkheim's argument is straightforward. There are three sections or books: in the first he asks, what is the 'original form of religious life'? and he then proceeds to refute the two standard positions, naturism and animism. This first book concludes with Durkheim's introduction to his own solution, totemism, and this is the principal subject of the final two sections—Book II investigating totemic beliefs, Book III examining totemic rituals. In the Conclusion, Durkheim derived from his 'one well-made experiment' inferences about religion in general.

His firm belief that 'there are no false religions' (p. 4) is the basis of his rejection of naturism and animism, for both supposed religion to be based on 'the product of a delirious interpretation' (p. 76). Naturists like Max Müller held that religion is born of the human imagination in confrontation with such natural phenomena as lightning, wind, stars, or fire. Personal agency was ascribed to natural occurrences when early humans, held captive by their language, took their own metaphoric descriptions of natural events literally. Thus when humans depicted lightning, for example, as that '*something* that hollows the ground as it falls' (p. 68), lightning eventually became a personified entity, a spiritual being. Animists like E. B. Tylor, in contrast, held that religion is born of the human confrontation with dreaming and death. Early humans understood dreams as the activities of one's double-self (one's soul). At death, the soul is released from the body and is thereby transformed into a spirit which continues to involve itself—for better or worse—in the lives of the living. In both the naturist's and the animist's account, the origin of religion is located in delusions—mistaking a metaphor for a powerful creature, or confusing the events of dreams with those

of waking hours. Durkheim, however, found it incomprehensible that religion could have survived for centuries if it were nothing but a 'system of misleading fictions' (p. 71). He stated emphatically that 'our entire study rests on this postulate: that this unanimous feeling of believers across time cannot be purely illusory' (p. 312).

All religions, then, are based on an objective reality, but that reality can only be understood by trained social scientists like Durkheim, not by ordinary believers. Durkheim agreed with the American pragmatist William James that the religious experience is an actual force operating in the lives of the faithful, granting them strength, aiding them in life. Unlike James, however, Durkheim was not as willing to privilege the believers' explanation of their religious experiences. Durkheim practised what today one might call a sociologist's hermeneutics of suspicion: the view that people cannot adequately account for their beliefs and actions because most of the people most of the time are unaware of the nature of the social webs that surround them. Hence even if a people's religious experience is not imaginary, its hidden source, Durkheim held, is none other than collective, human forces of which believers are unaware. Religion's collective fount is best revealed by what Durkheim and others held to be the most primitive known religion—totemism. Its simplicity presents us with the fact that the animals, plants, and individuals associated with the totem do not possess in and of themselves the sacred character that is often attributed to them. One must look beyond, beneath, or through them, to discover the true source of their religious power.

'The species that designates the clan collectively is called its *totem*. The totem of the clan is also that of each of its members' (p. 88). Thus Durkheim defined totemism. Australian tribes, Durkheim believed, are ordinarily divided into two exogamous groups (phratries), and each phratry contains a number of clans. Think of the clan as a large family unit; members of the clan are united by bonds of kinship and such mutual duties as mourning their dead, taking revenge on their enemies, and not marrying fellow members of the clan. Moreover, the clan is united by religious beliefs and practices that centre on the clan's totem—a sacred object or creature that serves as a collective emblem of the group. Without the totem the clan could not exist, because the totem provides members of the clan with their name, that is, their identity and hence unity. It is doubtful

that totemism ever existed as Durkheim understood it—a primitive, universal institution marked invariably by the totemic emblem, totemic taboos, and exogamy; none the less, totemism as an ideal type, to employ Weber's term, allowed Durkheim to construct a highly original and useful religious sociology. Appropriately, the first English edition of *The Elementary Forms* substituted *A Study in Religious Sociology* for the French subtitle, *le système totémique en Australie*. The English subtitle not only has the merit of indicating that the book is much more than a monograph on Australian totemism; 'Religious Sociology' also conveys the ambiguity of a work that is both a sociology of religion and a religious theory of society.

Totemism served as a convenient means for Durkheim to argue that religion is the collective represented in symbolic form. A Durkheimian account of the origin of religion and society might be illustrated by beginning with the Darwinian horde—an amorphous group of early humans driven largely by biological urges. Mostly, this population is dispersed, pursuing such utilitarian activities as hunting and gathering. Imagine, however, that one evening they gather as a group, huddled around a fire, and experience a sort of social electricity generated by their collectivity, or what Durkheim called effervescence. They had experienced something like it before, but this time it is different, because this time they were able to name it. As the shadows lengthened, they had caught sight of a fleeing kangaroo, thus revealing what they took to be the source of the group's effervescence, indeed, the basis of the members' lives: it is the Kangaroo, and they are the people of the Kangaroo. Now everything changes. With a name—with an identity—comes social membership and the distinction between insiders and outsiders. The universe can now be divided between that which belongs to the Kangaroo and that which does not, and from this spring all other classification systems. And with social identity come social ideals: hence these hitherto biologically driven creatures are transformed into socially creative humans. All this springs from the group's possession of a concrete, tangible symbol of their own unity. We have reached the beginning of society, and it commences with the birth of religion: the totem as a symbolic, religious representation of the community.

This Durkheimian, imaginary account of the origin of society elucidates Durkheim's fertile thesis that religion emerges from the

cauldron of collective effervescence and that religion is a symbol of the group's collective life. As he once put it rhetorically, if the totem is at once the symbol of the god and of the society, are the god and society 'not one and the same' (p. 154)? The totemic emblem represents to the clan symbolically yet concretely its otherwise intangible solidarity. Stated more generally, divinity is society transformed and conceived symbolically. Religion, then, is a set of beliefs and practices by which society represents itself to itself. It is the way society experiences itself as itself. Divinity and society are one—or rather, god is a figurative expression of society. If we feel dependent on god, that is but a symbolic representation of our dependency on society; if we tremble at god's justice and punishment, that is our regard for society's laws. Our reverence for divinity is but our respect for society; our belief in the immortality of the soul, our belief in the continuity of the collective life. Religion reflects society's collective aspects. Every society can be called religious, for any society lacking collective ways of thinking and acting is not in fact a society.

One might ask, does religion represent a group's pre-existing social unity or does it create that unity? Although Durkheim never explicitly addressed this issue, his work suggests that religion expresses a tenuous unity already there and then enhances it. As the early humans are transformed by religious effervescence from biologically determined creatures to inventive humans, their world is radically altered. What was once a mere band of discrete individuals becomes an idealized, sacred clan; what was once a mere plant or animal—a turkey or edible root, for instance—becomes a sacred totem, the very source of life; what was once a mere creek bed, for example, becomes a commanding, universal boundary separating the sacred from the profane. One might as well add, what was once a bit of coloured cloth becomes a sacred flag for which one is willing to die. To employ Durkheim's language, the sacred character assumed by aspects of the empirical world cannot be attributed to innate properties of that world; the sacred is added to the empirical world, and thereby becomes part of our description of it. Religion, then, first enables the group to recognize itself as a group, and thereafter the universe becomes a spiritualized extension of the group, whose meaning pertains to the group and supports its sense of identity and unity.

Episodes of religious effervescence punctuate the life of the

established clan or society. For us today, as for early humans, most of our time is consumed by such pedestrian activities as working, eating, and sleeping. Yet our mundane lives are periodically interrupted by social occasions—singing and dancing, protests and civic meetings—that gather us together and intensify our shared social ideals and sentiments. During times of carnival or political rallies, for example, not only is social unity strengthened but new ideals can be formed—ideals capable of leading us into novel directions. There are, of course, morphological and structural conditions that place limits on the nature of these new social forces; yet once new collective ideals are given birth, they themselves become autonomous social forces and are capable of spawning still more social ideals. There is nothing ethereal or elusive about these ideals. To employ Durkheim's late nineteenth-century vocabulary, these 'ideal' forces are just as 'empirical' as, say, population densities. 'The ideal society', Durkheim claimed, 'is not outside the real society; it is part of it' (p. 317). Indeed, it is a *natural* result of social life. One of the chief tasks of the social scientist, then, is to investigate the strength and nature of these autonomous, collective forces.

Durkheim defined religion in the following way: 'A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church' (p. 46). Think of beliefs as our representations of the world, and practices as how we comport ourselves in light of our beliefs (although it should be kept in mind that in Book III, Durkheim convincingly argued that practices are not merely externalizations of belief, for they can actively generate belief). The distinctive character of religious beliefs and practices, in Durkheim's view, is that they form a shared socio-linguistic framework that divides the furniture of the universe into two mutually exclusive categories, the sacred and the profane. Religious beliefs represent the sacred and its dramatic opposition to the profane; religious rites or practices translate these beliefs into rules or modes of conduct that observe the sacred and protect it from the profane. When Greek Orthodox believers, for example, approach the priest to receive communion, they are not to behave casually, chatting among themselves. The religious belief is that the body and blood of Christ are in the chalice; given this belief, the religious practice requires that believers

approach the priest quietly, solemnly. To behave solemnly is the opposite of behaving in a casual, commonplace manner, hence the chalice—the sacred—is protected from the profane. Note that here the profane is not inherently evil or contemptible; it is merely pedestrian, but as the pedestrian, it is in radical opposition to the sacred.

The sacred is collective, supple forces that can bring anything—any object, person, or gesture—into the category of the sacred. Society as a whole (as opposed to an assortment of disparate individuals) is ‘a moral being’ that transcends its members even as it resides within them and fashions them. This moral being—the collective forces of society—expresses its transcendence as it becomes incarnate in tangible aspects of the world about us, clothing them in the sacred. Moreover, the sacred is contagious. Although it may focus on a particular god or totem, it spreads out from this hub to those things connected to it. Thus not only are the body and blood sacred, to go back to my earlier example, but the chalice becomes a sacred object, the priest a sacred human, the church a sacred place; and the believers, to the extent that they participate in the sacred, they too assume a sacred character, even if to a lesser degree than the priest. Society, as a moral being composed of collective forces, is imagined in a variety of concrete forms, anointing many objects with the sacred.

The moral community, or what Durkheim sometimes simply called the Church, plays a prominent role in his definition of religion. Religion is not only beliefs and practices pertaining to the sacred and the profane; rather, religion is such beliefs and practices *insofar as* they forge moral community. Without moral community, there is no religion. Religious beliefs and practices are shared by the community, and this common faith indicates and promotes unity. Individuals, then, become members of a moral community by thinking and acting in common with respect to the sacred. Religion, in cementing together individuals in the common cult of their god, is actually attaching individuals to their society, building moral community. Durkheim frequently associated the sacred with the collective practices of the moral community, and the profane with the utilitarian activities of individuals pursuing self-interest. Thus the fundamental religious dichotomy between the sacred and the profane is parallel to the social dichotomy between the common life of the community and the private life of the individual.

This observation brings us close to the heart of Durkheim's thought. Human beings, he held, experience life on two planes: one is private, mundane, and utilitarian, the other collective, elevated, and moral. These two planes, Durkheim argued, are often religiously symbolized by the familiar dichotomy between the body and soul—a variation of the profane and sacred. Just as the sacred is protected from the profane, so the moral community is secured against excessive egoism or utilitarianism. A society whose members were consumed by narrow self-interest and mundane activities would eventually disintegrate. The argument here is that as individuals exclusively pursue the profane, they reside within an increasingly contracted private space, sharing less and less in common with one another, and hence their shared way of life becomes thin and unable to generate agreement on public goods, values, and ends. Religion, in contrast, links individuals to each other and to society by animating their lives with the sacred: powerful symbols—including 'secular' ones—that make and remake society's collective existence. Religion, in a phrase, is the way of thinking and acting characteristic of a society's shared life. Yet Durkheim never combated individualism in general, but atomistic individualism and egoism, and the public and private sorrow that accompanies these.

We are now in a good position to appreciate Durkheim's distinction between religion and magic—a distinction that underscores, once again, the salient role of the moral community in Durkheim's account of religion. Unlike religion, magic is strictly utilitarian and does not unite individuals in a common life. The distinction between religion and magic reflects the opposition between the sacred and the profane, the moral community and the isolated individual. Like religion, magic, too, consists of beliefs and rites that circulate in the group. Yet magic is directed only at private aims. Individuals hire magicians for their services as one might pay physicians and insurance agents for healing and protection. Magic entails individuals using the same cult, as opposed to partaking in a shared one. Hence Durkheim claimed that '*A church of magic does not exist. . . .* [Magic has] no lasting bonds that make [individuals] members of a moral body like the one formed by worshippers of the same god' (p. 43). This contrast between religion and magic is not original to Durkheim; and it is not a particularly useful sociological or anthropological distinction, for it does not distinguish types of institutions,

as Durkheim had implied, but types of human ends. Still, the contrast allowed Durkheim to express his normative judgement: insofar as the modern world is marked by atomistic individualism, it suffers from a dearth of moral goods that one associates with community. Humans do not live on bread—or magic—alone; in the absence of common, sacred aims, human flourishing cannot take place. This conception of our human condition motivated much of Durkheim's work, including his religious investigations.

Salient Themes

Perhaps the most important of Durkheim's themes in *The Elementary Forms* is his epistemology, that is, his theory of knowledge. Having read the available ethnographic material of his day, Durkheim was struck by the multiplicity of ways of organizing and categorizing the world. It was as if distinct societies lived each in their own world. Even the most seemingly simple human ability, such as seeing resemblances, could be manifested variously. 'The categories of human thought', Durkheim wrote, 'are never fixed in a definite form. They are made, unmade, and remade incessantly; they vary according to time and place' (p. 16).

The two leading epistemological theories of his day, empiricism associated with Hume and apriorism associated with Kant, could not account for the variety of coherent worlds Durkheim had encountered in ethnographies and historical studies. Empiricists maintained that all knowledge originates in the individual's senses; apriorists, in contrast, held that all knowledge is informed by the innate and universal categories of reason or the mind. The empiricists, in Durkheim's view, satisfy our sense that the individual's perception of the world is direct and unmediated, yet they deprive reason of its 'universality', 'necessity', and 'authority'. The upshot of this criticism was that the implicit individualism of empiricism cannot account for the coherence found within a given cultural world view. Tlingit Indians, for example, do not choose to see the similarity between a dog salmon and a dog (a similarity I have never been able to see). They just see it. Such vision carries a sense of necessity, authority, and—from a Tlingit's perspective—universality. The apriorists, on the other hand, recognize the universality, necessity, and authority of human thought. The mind,

transcending experience, imposes on it the universal and binding categories of reason. Yet the apriorists cannot give a satisfactory account of this. If the powers of the mind are innate, why can't I detect the similarity between a dog salmon and a dog? Apriorism cannot account for the variety of worlds. 'The point', Durkheim claimed, 'is to know why experience is not enough but presupposes conditions that are external and prior to it' (p. 16).

Durkheim maintained that progress toward a solution is possible by studying religion. Some might ask, what solution to an epistemological problem could possibly arise out of studying that messy cultural stuff, religion? Durkheim's response was that reason itself is shaped by unkempt socio-historical institutions, and religion has been the principal one. What might seem to be innate, universal categories of human thought such as time, space, class, number, cause, substance, and personhood are in fact culturally specific categories, whose medium is language. Even the distinction between right and left or the law of non-contradiction, according to Durkheim, is a social-linguistic artefact and is 'far from being inherent in human nature in general' (p. 14).

In Durkheim's genealogy of human thought, categories of cognition and perception emerged from that first human distinction between the sacred and profane. The category of time, for example, evolved as early humans set apart sacred intervals of religious festivities from profane seasons of work. 'Space' is the result of having divided the universe between sacred and profane districts. As more and more social classifications developed within the tribe, these classifications were extended to classifications of nature. If a tribe was divided into seven clans, for example, so was nature. Eventually, some categories and concepts—or as Durkheim sometimes called them, collective representations—became autonomous, existing independently of any specifically religious cosmology or world view. This is how science and logic acquired their objective vocabulary—their system of concepts. From the original religious distinction between the sacred and profane, for instance, came the scientific concept of the law of non-contradiction, that is, the principle that a statement and its negation cannot both be true. From the religious idea that society encompassed all things came the concept of totality, or as Durkheim put it, totality, society, and divinity are 'really just different aspects of one and the same notion' (p. 337 n. 2). Together,

sacred and mundane, moral and scientific collective representations constitute the socio-linguistic framework through which humans experience both the social and natural world.

Durkheim managed to salvage what is valuable in both the empiricist and the Kantian positions by bringing to the epistemological debate insight from his religious investigations. The chief insight was that 'if we accept the social origin of categories, a new perspective becomes possible that should help us avoid these contrary difficulties' (p. 17). His solution was to socialize the idealists and the empiricists. He agreed with the Kantians that human reason operates with categories, but contended that these categories are not inherent in humans. He agreed with the empiricists that the individual does 'directly' perceive the world, but contended that that world is and always has been a socially experienced world, or, as Durkheim put it, 'the world is inside society' (p. 337). This should not imply that Durkheim was a relativist. Although he argued that societies perceive the world differently, and that our thinking and speaking equipment is a cultural-linguistic creation, he also maintained that as science progresses, its system of concepts increasingly converges with the world as it is—'an ideal limit, to which we come ever closer but in all likelihood will never attain' (p. 341).

Durkheim's epistemology, or what is known as his sociology of knowledge, has helped to explain how even basic perceptions can vary from society to society. Also, it has provided a way for philosophers and others to let go of the idea that reason is a transcendent, ahistorical faculty, yet without having to jettison scientific objectivity. More important still, it has sustained the view that there can be no radically private human existence. To exist in a world is to understand that world, and understanding comprises shared, collective representations. This is not only an empirical description of human cognition, but it is also a normative position insofar as it challenges the atomistic assumptions of methodological individualism that Durkheim found morally unacceptable. Epistemology permitted Durkheim to feature once again the profoundly social nature of humankind.

Another important theme, the relation between religion and morality, was never far from Durkheim's thought, and this issue pervades *The Elementary Forms*. Religion—understood as morally significant collective beliefs and practices—addresses individuals in

the form of both external moral imperatives and internal desires of the heart. Individuals submit to religion as a source of the moral law that stands above them. Individuals also, however, experience the sacred as an integral aspect of their innermost being and as a source of joy, peace, and strength. The more Durkheim investigated religion, the more he employed the voluntaristic vocabulary of love, respect, and desire—as opposed to fear, obligation, and coercion—to describe the individual's moral life. He complained that Kant failed to appreciate that moral ends are in one aspect objects of desire. Doubting that 'the imperative was, in fact, the religious element in morality', Durkheim argued that 'the more sacred a moral rule becomes, the more the element of obligation tends to recede'.¹¹ This is not to say that Durkheim placed love above duty in the moral life; rather, he was eager to keep these two aspects in a harmonious tension. Grace and law, love and duty—these are alternative descriptions of our moral life. And both aspects spring from our twofold relation to the sacred: we are both governed by it and attracted to it.

Durkheim does not, however, reduce religion to morality. Another essential component of religion, in his view, is the 'recreative and aesthetic element'. Religion, Durkheim held, transports us into 'another [world] in which [our] imagination is more at ease' (p. 282). Religion constructs social arenas for play, for art, indeed, for 'all those things that renew the spirit worn down by the constraints of daily labour' (p. 284). Providing comfort and gaiety, religion grants social recreation: the group enjoys itself as it reaffirms itself.

The role and relevance of religion in past, present, and future societies is another of Durkheim's concerns found in *The Elementary Forms*. He concluded that 'there is something eternal in religion [. . .] that is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively cloaked itself' (p. 322). Religion enables humans to express and reaffirm symbolically what they share in common, and without such commonality there can be no society. By definition, society will continue to assume a sacred character, just as religion will continue to assume a social character. Insisting that 'there are no immortal gospels', Durkheim thought humanity capable of 'conceiving new ones' (p. 323). He would not venture,

¹¹ Émile Durkheim, 'Replies to Objections', in *Sociology and Philosophy*, trans. D. F. Pocock (New York: Free Press, 1974), 70.

however, to predict in detail the gospels of the future. Rather, he argued that Europe was going through a difficult transitional phase, and hence it was not easy to identify with precision the current sacred orientation of modern society. Judaism, Rome, and Christianity had largely supplied the moral and social scaffolding of European societies; this framework, however, was being replaced by a new one, as evidenced, for example, by the ideals of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, and fellowship—and the social privilege granted to science and all disciplines that place reason above unthinking dogma.

In spite of Durkheim's endorsement of these new trends, he worried that the rapid social and industrial changes of the nineteenth century had abruptly uprooted past institutions without putting new ones in their place. Sounding like Matthew Arnold, Durkheim lamented that 'the ancient gods grow old or die, and others are not yet born' (p. 322). Like Nietzsche's Madman who accused us of murdering God and unleashing the earth from the sun, Durkheim understood this between-times as an occasion for both alarm and excitement: worry over the loss of the past, anticipation for the promise of the future. This dual regard accounts for much of the difficulty in interpreting Durkheim as either an optimist or a pessimist.

Some features of the new, contemporary faith Durkheim believed he could discern perspicuously. The most important of these is moral individualism—the cult of the individual: a cluster of beliefs and practices, symbols and institutions that support the dignity and rights of the individual. This modern cult has all the religious attributes of traditional cults. It possesses robust, sacred symbols that express collective sentiments; it reaffirms and protects itself by means of both positive and negative rites, for example public celebrations of defenders of individual rights or the prosecution of those who would violate such rights. Moral individualism provides a moral framework for what can be referred to as liberal democracy's civil religion. Our commitment to the rights and dignity of the individual is the principal thread in the moral fabric that weaves us together as a people; pull or snip it, and our identity as a people unravels. It would not be much of an exaggeration to claim that Durkheim's chief motivation for writing *The Elementary Forms* was an interest in contemporary solidarity, not traditional religions. Moral individualism—as opposed to atomistic or utilitarian

individualism—became the answer to his question: what is the basis of today's common good?

Another principal theme in *The Elementary Forms* is the relation between religion and science. At a time when most assumed that religion and science share nothing in common, Durkheim held that they share a similar cognitive aim: to translate our encounter with the social and natural world into an intelligible language, and to organize such designations—our categories and concepts—into coherent systems of classification. Science began as a religious institution, specifically, as that aspect of religion that concerned itself with interpretation and explanation. To this day, science—indeed, reason itself—remains a social institution. The biologist, for example, employs socially constructed concepts and works within an inherited, scientific tradition that guides her principal methods and enquiries. Increasingly, however, religion (as traditionally understood) and science have separated. Those cognitive functions of religion that serve to render the world intelligible have largely fallen to science, while those ritual functions that serve to animate, motivate, and regulate society have remained within the religious sphere. To speak euphemistically, religion and science have enjoyed a division of labour. Religious institutions proper—that is to say, churches and synagogues, for example—have not always appreciated this division. First they reluctantly yielded to science's encroachment in the domain of the natural sciences, and ultimately, Durkheim held, they will give way to the social sciences. This development—disengaging the sciences and the life of critical reason from traditional religious institutions—is, in Durkheim's mind, a feature of progress.

Durkheim, then, often juxtaposed science to religious institutions proper, that is, to what one usually thinks of as traditional or world religions. However, Durkheim also had a broad understanding of the religious, and in this broad sense, facets of science itself have assumed a religious quality. The spirit of free enquiry, a self-conscious elimination of bias, a commitment to objectivity—these guiding scientific ideals have acquired a sacred status. When we hear of a natural or social scientist being censured or threatened by a religious organization, we rally to the scientist's aid, for our moral sensibilities have been offended. Not only have the values of science become sacred, but its role has as well, insofar as science contributes to human well-being.

To today's readers this may sound alien, but Durkheim believed—or hoped—that scientists in the future, especially social scientists, would substantially ameliorate our social policies and institutional arrangements by leading them toward social justice and economic stability. Indeed, scientists and educators would become something like our future priests: sacred figures leading us toward a genuine humanism—the religion of humanity. This development would entail, among other things, translating the moral treasures of religious traditions into a rational, secular language. This position was characteristic of Durkheim: he neither joined those secular ethicists who denied the moral significance of religious traditions, nor did he join those theologians who insisted that only belief in God could safeguard public morality. Rather, Durkheim acknowledged and sought to capture the good gifts of religion by subjecting them to a critical spirit and rendering them in a vocabulary suitable for today.

The rise of science, it should be clear, does not entail the demise of religion. Durkheim insisted that religion could not be entirely supplanted by either the role or methods of science: 'Insofar as religion is action, insofar as it is a human way of living, science could not possibly take its place, for if it expresses life, it does not create it. Science can indeed seek to explain faith, but by this very fact it presupposes it' (p. 325). The full significance of this statement is not easy to comprehend, but in part it suggests that while science may present to us its results and facts, we still need religion—dynamic symbols and ideals—to move us into action, especially when the way to proceed is not entirely clear. The pragmatic exigencies of our lives cannot always wait for the judicious results of science. Beyond that, the statement also suggests that society will continue to make sacred those aspects of our shared forms of life that bind us together in moral community. Should we as a people ever be dominated by purely instrumental reason or utilitarian calculations, and lack those sacred beliefs, rites, and symbols that 'create life,' we would become as T. S. Eliot's hollow men:

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion.¹²

¹² T. S. Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', in *Selected Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1937), 77.

Again, however, this is not to juxtapose the sacred to science *per se*. Aspects of science, too, have become sacred, which is but another way to say that science cannot be reduced to the goals of narrow instrumentalism or utilitarianism.

Durkheim and the Question of Methodology

In the secondary literature on Durkheim's methodology, one finds a host of diverse labels: Durkheim the materialist, the idealist, the positivist, the symbolist, the functionalist or structuralist. Durkheim is all and hence none of these. With Marx, Durkheim held that society's material and morphological bases must be included in any comprehensive social interpretation. Relatedly, Durkheim challenged the assumptions of methodological individualism as forcefully as did Marx. Yet unlike Marx, or Saint-Simon for that matter, Durkheim did not maintain that economics was the single engine of society and the future motor of social happiness. When Durkheim separated religion from magic, he was suggesting that the cures to our deepest social sorrows cannot be prescribed by the magician, that is, by technological or economic advancement. Our social malaise is moral and spiritual, as are the remedies. Durkheim often wrote wistfully of our need for fresh sacred ideals, rites, and symbols to rejuvenate us as a people: to furnish us with a profound vision of justice and equality, and to kindle within us a love and respect for those admirable features that enrich our shared, social world. Economic and technological gains certainly contribute to that world; yet they alone cannot make it a social home in which to dwell and flourish.

Durkheim's emphasis on a 'spiritual' solution, however, should not tag him with the label 'idealist'. Durkheim dissociated himself from reductive forms of both idealism and materialism. He never attempted to render systematically a culture's values, beliefs, and goals as an expression of a material substratum. In *The Elementary Forms* he noted that he wanted to avoid 'a simple revival of historical materialism. . . . By showing something essentially social in religion, we do not in the least mean that it is confined to expressing the material forms of society and its immediately vital necessities in another language' (p. 318). Yet within the same paragraph he wrote, 'we take it as obvious that social life depends on and bears the mark

of its material substrate'. Neither an idealist nor a materialist, Durkheim endeavoured to portray the inextricable, transactional relation between the material and the conceptual world. To speak of two worlds, in fact, is misleading. Durkheim materialized ideals and idealized matter—and he historicized both. In the process, he overcame a set of tyrannous dualisms—empiricism and apriorism, materialism and idealism, nature and culture. The resulting position appropriately describes the materiality of beliefs, values, ideals, and customs, as well as the sociality of knowledge, facts, things, and logic.

Durkheim the scientist certainly valued facts as much as any in the positivist camp; yet assigning Durkheim to that camp is like confining Sissy, in Dickens's *Hard Times*, to Mr Gradgrind's home: such quarters are too narrow to contain a view of the world too rich and complex for us to believe, with Gradgrind, that 'facts alone are wanted in life'. As Sissy understood that the meaning of 'horse' is more than a list of attributes—a quadruped, graminivorous, forty teeth, and so forth—but must contain some reference to its significance to her family and community; so Durkheim understood that the interpretation of social facts entails not only compiling quantitative data but also discerning the meaning of such facts to the people affected by them. His religious investigations, more than any others, led him to attend to the meaningfulness or significance of collective ideals, symbols, and rites for those who are enlivened by them. He did not, we have seen, privilege the participant's interpretation; nor, however, did he ignore or dismiss it. He held that our descriptions and explanations of religious beliefs and rites, for example, are incomplete if we fail to make reference to their meaning to the believers. Durkheim's work on religion taught him much about the complexity and hence difficulties of social interpretation. The interpretative challenges are not due to a lack of useful social scientific methods or powerful tools, but arise because the subject matter—humans in society—is rich, dynamic, intricate, and inherently ambiguous.

In spite of the complexity of this material, Durkheim sought to identify the functions of religion, law, and other institutions. Religious beliefs and rites, he held, function to strengthen the bonds of social solidarity. Law functions not principally to penalize the criminal, but to articulate and fortify a community's social sentiments. Social functions emerge from and reflect the social structures in which they are embedded. Population densities, levels of

homogeneity, rules of membership, social values, and a host of other considerations are indicative of distinct types of social structures. These structures, while often complex, are not haphazard, but have a particular morphology that the trained sociologist can discern and analyse. Durkheim's pioneering work on the mechanisms and logic of social functions and structures has assigned him the labels functionalist and structuralist. Again, however, we do Durkheim a disservice when we sequester him by thus branding him. Although Durkheim highlighted the importance of structural and functional social components, he also recognized that collective beliefs, ideals, and symbols can assume a life of their own and lead society into novel directions, thus modifying the very social structures which gave them birth.

Critique and Celebration of The Elementary Forms

Durkheim's placement in so many theoretical or methodological camps, one would like to think, is a sign of homage. From the start, there were disputes over how to interpret *The Elementary Forms*, and these have not subsided. Few, even among Durkheim's more severe critics, have doubted the profundity of the book. Yet like all classic texts, it has drawn criticism, that is, it has been taken seriously. Many are critical of the use and quality of Durkheim's ethnographic material. Some claim Durkheim's 'one well-made experiment' was a bit too well made, that is, his control group—Australian Aborigines, specifically the Arunta—was too restrictive to support a global theory of religion; and his interpretation of this group was overdetermined by his theoretical framework (Durkheim frequently advanced ingenious, ad hoc interpretations of those aspects of the Australians' social life that did not readily support his theories). Others claim that not only is the sacred and profane not a universal dichotomy, but it cannot even be found among the people Durkheim studied. The dichotomy, some argue, seems more descriptive of the religions in Durkheim's Europe—Judaism and Christianity—than of the Australians whom Durkheim studied. Some question Durkheim's equation of totemism with the religion of the clan, while others doubt the very existence of totemism as a distinct religious organization and social structure.

More recent critics have noted that while Durkheim recognized that religions often associate women with the profane, he failed to explore how this can result in violence against women. In light of the full range of positions available to Durkheim, it would not be anachronistic to complain that Durkheim's thought on women could have been more progressive (although, by this same measure, his thought could also be and has been described as moderately feminist). Along similar lines, some have claimed that *The Elementary Forms* supports a conservative agenda. In this view, Durkheim was a conservative sociologist preoccupied with understanding and maintaining social order, and to that end, he attempted to subdue 'the individual' and curtail social change. This is the only judgement that I wish here to address.

Durkheim investigated the webs and patterns of social order for the sake of transforming and moving it toward social justice. Many have attributed conservatism to Durkheim because of his commitment to viewing humans and their moral beliefs and practices as ineluctably rooted in their social milieux. The logic here goes something like this: social theorists who begin and end with humans firmly rooted in their historical, socio-linguistic contexts can never rise above present or past social ideals, customs, and institutions. Yet Durkheim's sensitivity to the historical, far from tying him to a status quo, exposed him to social change and diversity. Acknowledging that we move in historical webs, according to Durkheim, is the first step toward understanding and reconstructing them. Moreover, to dismiss Durkheim as a conservative social theorist hostile to 'the individual' is to disregard his life's commitment to furthering the dignity and rights of the individual.

Still, none of the above criticisms is without some validity. Like many original thinkers, Durkheim's capacity to focus his sight to an incandescent point is the source of both his shortcomings and strengths. The staying power of *The Elementary Forms* is attested to by its perspectives that continue to frame the thought of leading anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of religion. Indeed, its influence is inescapable. If France lost Durkheim at the moment of his death, the international scholarly community discovered him after the Second World War. Along with Marx and Weber, Durkheim is now assured his place among the founders of modern social theory. More than any other figure in history, Durkheim has

helped us to understand the religious aspects of the social and the social aspects of the religious.

The Elementary Forms, Durkheim's last book, was the first to be translated into English. It has become one of our best examples of the moral imagination of the social scientist, of socio-historical skill joined to moral commitment. This vocation Durkheim shared with that other famous sociologist of his generation, Max Weber. Both men had grave concerns about the future of modern western societies. Yet whereas Weber could see in that future only disenchantment and the iron cage of grim bureaucracy, Durkheim saw the possibility of the birth of new gods, that is, innovative, sacred avenues of human flourishing not yet realized. It is problematic, I have said, to designate Durkheim an optimist or a pessimist. Yet insofar as he remained sanguine, his hope sprang from his belief that religious forms of life would endure and that these were capable of empowering us with a sense of belonging, allowing us to be at home in the world.

Toward the end of his life, Durkheim's world inch by inch was becoming unlivable. War, death, and degradation had stained it. In response, Durkheim increased his efforts to transform it, in particular, to mitigate human suffering. In one of his last publications, he wrote of a religious spirit that was gathering: a humane religion committed to justice, dedicated to human dignity. A religion with which we could live. Whether Durkheim's vision or Weber's cage awaits us, who can say? Perhaps only we can. That surely would have been Durkheim's reply.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

THE first edition of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Paris: Alcan) was published in 1912. This edition contained some typographical errors, and subsequent French editions introduced additional corruptions. The present translation is based on the 1991 Livre de Poche edition, and all references to the French cite the Poche edition. This edition was chosen because it is readily available and affordable for those who wish to consult the French. Although the Poche edition eradicated many of the corruptions introduced by previous editions, it did not eradicate all of them, and, unfortunately, added some new ones. I am grateful to Dominique Merllié for sharing with me his meticulous list of corruptions in the 1991 Poche edition. The Oxford World's Classics translation incorporates his corrections.

On the Abridgement

The text has been abridged by roughly 25 per cent. Digressions, redundant examples, and endnotes referring to dated controversies and ethnographic material supplied most of the deletions. All significant references have been retained, for example those that refer to pivotal influences on Durkheim, or references to his and his colleagues' earlier work. I have also retained all passages that pertained to topical issues, for example the role of women in religion. Few deletions came from Durkheim's Introduction, and none from the Conclusion. My goal was to produce a readable edition that conveys Durkheim's principal ideas and arguments, not a definitive reference work for Durkheimians who are interested in tracking the more antiquarian aspects of his thought.

Deletions are indicated by three omission points in square brackets. References have been silently expanded or contracted as necessary, but all other interventions by the translator are in square brackets.

Editions

With this edition, there are now three English translations of Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Within three years of the original French volume, Joseph Swain provided the English-speaking world with a timely, although hasty, translation in 1915. That edition, published by Free Press, carries no introduction and a cursory index. In 1995 Karen Fields provided a flowing translation, accompanied by an introduction, editorial notes, and a thorough index. One of the merits of Fields's edition, also published by Free Press, is the expansion of Durkheim's often highly abbreviated references in the footnotes, which have been drawn upon in this edition.

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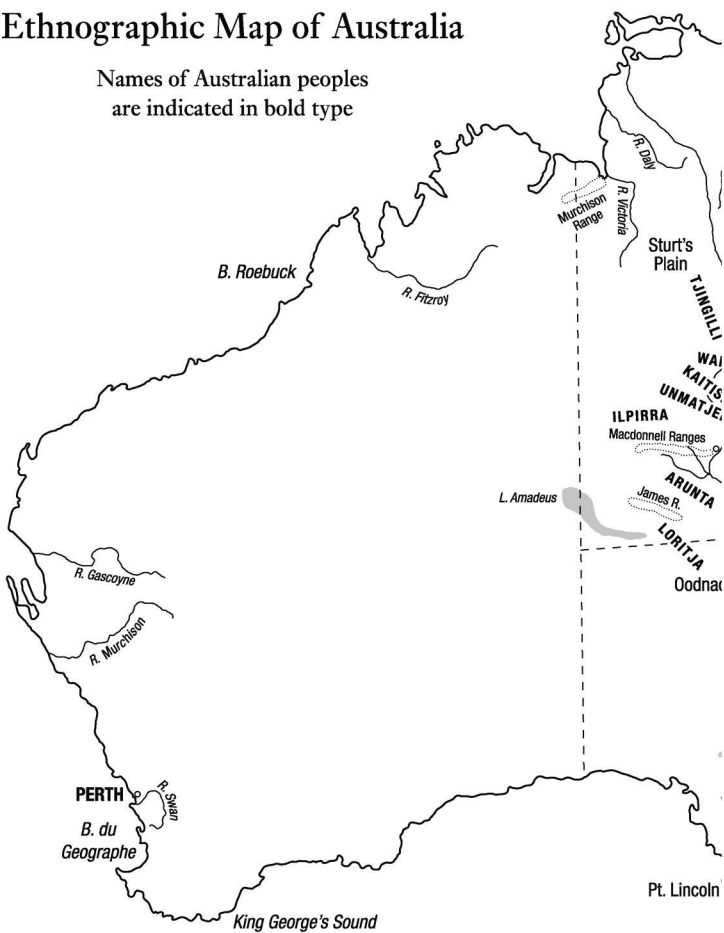
A CHRONOLOGY OF ÉMILE DURKHEIM

- 1858 Birth of David Émile Durkheim in Épinal, in the region of Lorraine, France, to Mélanie Isidor and Moïse Durkheim. Durkheim's mother was an embroiderer, and she earned the same modest sum as Durkheim's father, who was a rabbi. Durkheim's grandfather (Israël David Durkheim) and great-grandfather (Simon Simon) were also rabbis.
- 1858–76 Childhood in a traditional, orthodox Jewish community at Épinal. Durkheim was the youngest among three siblings, his sisters Rosine and Céline and his brother Félix.
- 1870 German soldiers occupy Épinal during the Franco-Prussian War
- 1876 Durkheim moves to Paris and begins his preparatory studies for admission into the École Normale Supérieure.
- 1879 After his third attempt, Durkheim is admitted to the École Normale Supérieure, where he studies with Charles Renouvier and Fustel de Coulanges, among others.
- 1882–5 Durkheim teaches philosophy at various *lycées*.
- 1885–6 Durkheim receives a French grant to study at several German universities, including Berlin, Marburg, and Leipzig, and he becomes familiar with the work of Wilhelm Wundt, the German socio-psychologist.
- 1886 Victory Hombay, Durkheim's closest friend at the École, apart from Jean Jaurès, commits suicide.
- 1887 Durkheim marries Louise Dreyfus, and they subsequently have two children, Marie and André.
- 1887–1902 Durkheim holds a teaching post in social science and education at the University of Bordeaux.
- 1893 *The Division of Labour in Society* published.
- 1895 *The Rules of Sociological Method* published.
- 1897 *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* published.
- 1898 First volume of Durkheim's journal *L'Année sociologique* published; height of the Dreyfus Affair.
- 1902–17 Durkheim holds a teaching post in education at the Sorbonne.

- 1903 'Primitive Classification', co-authored with his nephew Marcel Mauss, published in *L'Année sociologique*.
- 1912 *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* published.
- 1913 Durkheim's teaching post is renamed to include the field of sociology.
- 1914-18 First World War; Durkheim applies himself entirely to the war effort, writing essays and organizing committees that challenged Germany's war propaganda and sustained French patriotism. He served on over fourteen government committees.
- 1916 Confirmation of Durkheim's son's death in battle; a senator accuses Durkheim of being a German sympathizer; due to pressure in the senate, the accusation is withdrawn.
- 1917 Durkheim dies. He is buried at the Cimetière du Montparnasse.

Ethnographic Map of Australia

Names of Australian peoples
are indicated in bold type





**THE
ELEMENTARY FORMS OF
RELIGIOUS LIFE**

INTRODUCTION

THE SUBJECT OF STUDY

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION AND THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

I

IN this book we propose to study the most primitive* and simplest religion currently known, to analyse it and attempt to explain it. We call a religious system the most primitive we have been able to observe when it fulfils the two following conditions: first, when it is found in societies whose organization is of the utmost simplicity;¹ and second, when it can be explained without introducing any element borrowed from an earlier religion.

We shall do our best to describe the interrelated components of this system with the precision and accuracy of an ethnographer or a historian. But our task will not be limited to this. Sociology sets for itself problems other than those posed by history or ethnography. It pursues knowledge of the earlier forms of civilization not only to know them and reconstruct them, but, like all positive science,* its goal is first and foremost to explain a current reality, something close to us and consequently capable of affecting our ideas and actions. This reality is man, more specifically man today. Indeed, knowing him well is a matter of some urgency. We shall not study a very archaic religion, then, just for the pleasure of recounting its oddities and singularities. We have made it the subject of our study because it seems most likely to yield an understanding of the religious nature of man, by showing us an essential and permanent aspect of humanity.

But this proposition will surely raise some strong objections. It seems strange to transport ourselves back to our historical beginnings in order to know humanity as it is today. Such a procedure seems particularly paradoxical in the present case. Religions are thought to differ in value and rank; it is generally said that some are truer than others. The highest forms of religious thought cannot, it

¹ We shall call these societies and the people who live in them primitives in the same sense. This expression may be imprecise, but it is hard to avoid; furthermore, when its meaning is carefully defined, it is very useful.

seems, be compared to the lowest without degrading the former to the level of the latter. After all, if we claim that the crude cults of the Australian tribes can help us understand Christianity, for example, does this not suggest that they both issue from the same mentality, that Christianity consists of the same superstitions and rests on the same errors? This is how the theoretical importance sometimes ascribed to primitive religions has come to be the sign of a systematic hostility toward religion, which, by prejudging the results of research, contaminates them in advance.

We have no intention here of trying to determine whether there are scholars who have deserved this reproach, and who have used the history and ethnography of religion as a weapon against religion itself. In any case, a sociologist of religion would not hold such a view. It is a basic postulate of sociology that a human institution cannot rest on error and falsehood or it could not endure. If it were not based on the nature of things, it would have met with resistance from those very things and could not have prevailed. When we approach the study of primitive religions, then, it is with the certainty that they are rooted in reality and are an expression of it; we shall see this principle continually reasserted in the course of the analyses and discussions that follow. Our complaint against the schools from which we have diverged is precisely that they have misunderstood this principle. When we regard the formulas literally, of course, these religious beliefs and practices seem at times disconcerting, and we may be tempted to see them as fundamentally aberrant. But we must reach beneath the symbol to the reality it embodies and which gives it its true meaning. The most barbarous or bizarre rituals and the strangest myths translate some human need, some aspect of life, whether individual or social. The reasons the believer uses to justify them may be, and generally are, mistaken; none the less the true reasons exist, and it is the business of science to discover them.

In reality, then, there are no false religions. All are true in their fashion: all respond, if in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence. It is not impossible, of course, to rank them in some sort of hierarchical order. Some can be called superior to others in the sense that they stimulate higher mental functions, that they are richer in ideas and feelings, that they involve more concepts, with fewer sensations and images, and that their systematic arrangement

is more intelligent. But as real as this greater complexity and abstraction may be, it is not sufficient to place the corresponding religions in separate categories. All are equally religions, just as all living beings are equally alive, from the humblest unicellular organism to man. We turn to primitive religions, then, not with the ulterior motive of depreciating religion in general, for these religions are no less worthy than others. They answer the same needs, they play the same role, they issue from the same causes. They can effectively serve, as a result, to show the nature of religious life and consequently to resolve the problem we have set for ourselves.

But why grant them a special prerogative? Why distinguish them from all others as our subject of study? Solely for methodological reasons.

First of all, we can achieve an understanding of the most recent religions only by following the way they developed historically.* History is, indeed, the only method of explanatory analysis that can be applied to them. It alone allows us to dissolve an institution into its constituent elements, showing us their birth in time, one after the other. Furthermore, by situating each one within the context in which it arose, this method gives us the only way we have of determining its original cause. Whenever we try to explain something human viewed at a particular moment in time—whether a religious belief, a moral law, a legal precept, an aesthetic practice, or an economic system—we must begin by returning to its simplest and most primitive form. We must try to discover the qualities that define it at this period of its existence, and then show how it gradually developed, grew more complex, and became what it is at the moment under scrutiny.

Now, it is easy to imagine how crucial it is to determine the point of departure for this series of progressive explanations. A Cartesian principle* has it that the first link plays a major role in the chain of scientific truths. Of course, the science of religion can hardly be based on a notion elaborated in the Cartesian manner—a logical concept, a pure possibility constructed only by the powers of mind. We must find a concrete reality that historical and ethnographical observation alone can reveal to us. But if this crucial conception must be arrived at by non-Cartesian methods, it is certain none the less to have a considerable influence on all the propositions that follow from this science. Biological evolution was conceived of quite

differently from the moment we knew of the existence of unicellular organisms. Similarly, religious facts are explained differently when the source of their evolution is viewed as naturism as opposed to animism or some other religious form. Even the most specialized scholars must choose among these hypotheses for their inspiration if they want to understand the facts they are analysing, or else limit themselves to pure erudition. Like it or not, the questions they ask take the following form: what has caused naturism or animism to develop a particular feature, to be enriched or impoverished in a particular way? Since taking sides in this initial problem is unavoidable, and since the solution provided is bound to affect the science as a whole, it is best dealt with at the outset. And this is what we propose to do.

Besides, apart from these indirect repercussions, the study of primitive religions has an immediate interest of the greatest importance.

It is indeed useful to know what a particular religion is about, yet it is far more important to discover what religion is in general. This is the problem that from time immemorial has piqued the curiosity of philosophers, and not without reason; it interests all of humanity. Unfortunately, the method philosophers ordinarily use to solve it is purely dialectical: they confine themselves to analysing their idea of religion, and simply illustrate the results of this mental analysis with examples borrowed from religions that best embody their model. While this method must be discarded, the problem of defining religion remains; and philosophy's great service has been to prevent it from being settled by the disdain of specialists. Now, it can be approached in other ways. Since all religions are comparable, all species of the same genus, they all share certain essential elements. By this we do not mean only the external and visible features they all display which allow a provisional definition of religion at the beginning of research. The discovery of these outward signs is relatively easy, for the observation required does not go beyond the surface of things. But these external resemblances suggest deeper ones. At the basis of all systems of belief and all cults there must be a certain number of fundamental representations and ritual practices that, despite the diversity of forms they assume in the various religions, have the same objective meanings and fulfil the same functions. It is these permanent elements that constitute something eternal and

human in religion; they provide the objective content of the idea that is expressed when we speak of *religion* in general. How can these elements be discovered?

Certainly not by observing complex religions that appear late in history. Each of these is formed from such a variety of elements that it is quite difficult to distinguish the secondary from the primary, the essential from the inessential. Just think of religions like those of Egypt, India, or classical antiquity: an impenetrable tangle of many cults that vary with localities, temples, generations, dynasties, invasions, and so on. Popular superstitions are mingled with more refined dogmas. Neither religious thought nor practice is equally shared among the mass of the faithful. Beliefs as well as rites are experienced in different ways, depending on the men, the milieux, and the circumstances. Here we find priests, there monks, elsewhere lay persons; there are mystics and rationalists, theologians and prophets, and so on. Under such conditions it is difficult to see what they all have in common. It is possible to study effectively some particular aspect that is highly developed in one of these systems, such as sacrifice or prophecy, monasticism or mysteries. But how do we discover the common basis of religious life beneath all this luxuriant vegetation? How do we recover the fundamental states characteristic of the religious mentality in general beneath the clash of theologies, the variations of ritual, the multiplicity of groupings, the diversity of individuals?

The case is quite different in lower societies. The lesser development of individuals, the smaller group, the homogeneity of external circumstances all contribute to reducing differences and variations to a minimum. The group normally embodies an intellectual and moral uniformity found only rarely in more advanced societies. Everything is common to all. Movements are stereotypical; everyone executes the same ones in the same circumstances; this conformity of conduct merely translates a conformity of thought. Since all conscious minds are drawn along in the same current, the individual type almost overlaps with the general type. While everything is uniform, everything is simple. There is nothing as unpolished as those myths composed of a single theme endlessly repeated, or those rites consisting of a small number of gestures performed over and over again. The popular or priestly imagination has had neither the time nor the means to refine and

transform the primary material of ideas and religious practices. This primary material can therefore be observed with little effort. The inessential, the secondary, the extraneous have not yet concealed the main line of development.¹ Everything is reduced to what is indispensable, to the minimal requirements of religion. But what is indispensable is also fundamental, and therefore crucial for us to know.

Primitive civilizations, then, are privileged cases because they are simple cases. This is why, among all orders of facts, the observations of ethnographers have often been veritable revelations that have renewed the study of human institutions. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, people were convinced that the father was the essential element of the family; a familial organization that did not hinge on the power of the father was inconceivable. Bachofen's discovery overturned this old idea. Until recently it was considered self-evident that the moral and legal relations which constitute kinship were just another aspect of physiological relations that result from shared ancestry. Bachofen and his successors McLennan, Morgan,* and many others were still under the influence of this preconception. Since we have come to know the nature of the primitive clan, however, we know that, on the contrary, kinship cannot be defined by common blood line. To come back to religions, the exclusive contemplation of the religious forms most familiar to us led to the long-held belief that the notion of god was characteristic of everything religious. Now, the religion that we will study below is for the most part a stranger to any idea of divinity; the forces to which its rites are addressed are very different from those central to our modern religions, and yet they will help us to understand these better. Nothing is more unwarranted, then, than the disdain with which too many historians still regard the work of ethnographers. The fact of the matter is that ethnography has often spurred the most fertile revolutions in the various branches of sociology. For the same reason, the discovery of unicellular organisms, which we noted earlier, transformed our current conception of life. As with such

¹ This is not to suggest that all primitive cults exclude the extraneous. We shall see, on the contrary, that in every religion we find beliefs and practices that are not strictly utilitarian (Book III, Ch. 4, s. 11). This extravagance is indispensable to religious life, part of its very essence. But it is much more rudimentary in lower religions than in others, and this makes it easier to discover the reason for its existence.

simple creatures, when life is reduced to its essential features, those features are hard to miss.

Primitive religions not only allow us to separate the constituent elements of religion, but they also have the great advantage of helping us to explain it. Because the facts are simpler, the connections between the facts are also more apparent. The reasons people give to explain their actions to themselves have not yet been refined and rarefied by informed reflection; they are closer and more related to the motives that have actually caused those actions. To understand a delirium and treat it properly, the doctor needs to know its origin. This event is much more easily discerned when the delirium can be observed soon after it has begun. And the more developed the illness, the more it recedes from sight. All sorts of interpretations have intervened that tend to repress the original state into the unconscious and replace it with others, often making the original difficult to find. The distance between a systematized delirium and the first impressions that gave rise to it is often considerable. The same is true for religious thought. As it progresses historically, the causes that called it into existence, though still exerting their influence, are now glimpsed only through a vast system of distorting interpretations. Popular mythologies and subtle theologies have done their work: they have superimposed very different feelings over the original feelings which they elaborate, allowing only a very imperfect view of their true nature. The psychological distance between cause and effect, between the apparent cause and the effective cause, has become greater and more difficult for the mind to span. The rest of this work will be an illustration and a proof of this methodological observation. We shall see how, in primitive religions, the religious phenomenon still bears the visible imprint of its origins; it would be more difficult for us to infer those origins by considering only more developed religions.

Our study, then, is a way of taking up the old problem of the origin of religions *under new conditions*. Certainly if what we mean by origin is an absolute first beginning, the question is not in the least scientific and must be firmly dismissed. There is no crucial moment when religion began to exist, and the point is not to find a way to transport ourselves there by thought. Like any human institution, religion begins nowhere. So all speculations of this kind are rightly discredited; they can be only subjective and arbitrary constructions

that cannot be tested. The problem we pose is entirely different. We would like to find a way of discovering the ever-present causes that generate the most essential forms of religious thought and practice. Now, for the reasons just mentioned, these causes are much more easily observable when the societies in which they are observed are less complex. This is why we are interested in getting closer to origins.¹ It is not that we endow lower religions with special virtues. Quite the contrary, they are rudimentary and crude; there can be no question of holding them up as models for later religions to emulate. But their very crudeness makes them instructive; they are made up of useful experiments in which the facts and their interrelations are easier to perceive. To discover the laws of phenomena he studies, the physicist seeks to simplify them, to strip them of their secondary characteristics. When it comes to institutions, nature spontaneously makes simplifications of the same kind at the beginning of history. We only want to profit by them. Of course, we shall be able to glean only very elementary facts by this method. When we have accounted for these to the greatest possible extent, the novelties of all sorts produced in the course of evolution will still be unexplained. Though we have no wish to deny the importance of the problems posed by such novelties, we think they benefit from being treated at the appropriate time, and broached only after those we are about to study.

II

Our study is of interest not only to scholars of religion. Every religion has an aspect that goes beyond the confines of religious ideas proper, and here the study of religious phenomena provides a means of reviewing problems that until now have been debated only among philosophers.

We have known for a long time that the first systems of representation which man made of the world and of himself were religious in origin. There is no religion that is not a cosmology as well as a speculation on the divine. If philosophy and the sciences arose from

¹ It will be observed that the word 'origins', like the word 'primitive', is used in an entirely relative sense. This does not mean an absolute starting point but the simplest social state currently known or knowable at present. When we speak of origins, of the beginnings of history or of religious thought, this is the sense in which these expressions should be understood.

religion, it is because religion itself began by playing the role of science and philosophy. But it has been less frequently noted that religion has not merely enriched a preformed human mind with a certain number of ideas; it has helped to form that mind. Men owe to religion not only a good part of their knowledge but also the form in which this knowledge is elaborated.

At the source of our judgements are a certain number of essential notions that dominate our entire intellectual life. These are what philosophers since Aristotle have called the categories of understanding: notions of time, space, genus, number, cause, substance, personality, and so on. They correspond to the most universal properties of things. They are the solid frames that enclose all thought. Thought does not seem able to break out of them without destroying itself, since we seem unable to think of objects that are not in time or space, that are not countable, and so on. Other notions are contingent and shifting; we can imagine a person, a society, or an era that can do without them; but the primary categories seem inseparable from the normal functioning of the mind. They are, so to speak, the armature of intelligence. Now, when primitive religious beliefs are systematically analysed, these basic categories are encountered in the process. They are born in religion and of religion; they are a product of religious thought. This is a point we shall have occasion to make repeatedly in the course of this work.

This point is of some interest in itself, but here is what gives it its full range of implication. The general conclusion of the book you are about to read is that religion is something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rituals are ways of acting that are generated only within assembled groups and are meant to stimulate and sustain or recreate certain mental states in these groups. But if these categories of thought have religious origins, they must participate in what is common to all religious phenomena: they too must be social things, the products of collective thought. At the very least—considering the present state of our knowledge of these matters, it is best to refrain from any radical and exclusive statements—it is legitimate to assume that these categories are rich in social elements.

Even now this social dimension can be glimpsed in some of them. Try, for example, to imagine the notion of time without the procedures by which we divide, measure, and express it by means of

objective signs, a time that is not a succession of years, months, weeks, days, and hours. It is almost unthinkable. We can conceive of time only by differentiating between discrete moments. Now, what is the source of this differentiation? Of course, states of consciousness that we have already experienced can be reproduced in the same order in which they originally occurred; and so parts of our past become present to us once again, even as they are spontaneously distinguished from the present. But as important as this distinction may be for our private experience, it is hardly sufficient to constitute the notion or category of time. For time is not merely a partial or total commemoration of our past life; it is an abstract and impersonal framework that encompasses not only our individual existence but that of humanity. It is like a continuous canvas on which all duration is spread out in the mind's eye, and on which all possible events can be located in relation to fixed and determined reference points. It is not *my time* that is organized this way, but time as it is objectively conceived by everyone in the same civilization. This alone suggests that such an organization must be collective. And indeed observation confirms that these indispensable reference points, in relation to which all things are located temporally, are borrowed from social life. The divisions into days, weeks, months, years, and so on correspond to the recurring cycle of rituals, holidays, and public ceremonies.¹ A calendar expresses the rhythm of collective activity while ensuring its regularity.²

The same is true of space. As Hamelin has shown,³ space is not the vague and indeterminate medium Kant* imagined. If it were purely

¹ In support of this assertion see Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Mélanges d'histoire des religions (Travaux de L'Année sociologique)*, the chapter on 'La représentation du temps dans la religion' (Paris: Alcan, 1909).

² We can see the enormous difference between the complex of sensations and images that serve to orient us in duration and the category of time. The first are the sum of individual experiences, meaningful only to the individual who has had them. By contrast, the category of time expresses a time common to the group. This is social time, so to speak, and is itself a kind of social institution. It is also peculiar to men; animals have no representation of this kind.

This distinction between the category of time and its corresponding sensations might be made equally with regard to space or cause. Perhaps it would help to dispel certain confusions that fuel the controversies surrounding these questions. We shall return to this point in the Conclusion to the present work (s. IV).

³ Octave Hamelin, *Essai sur les éléments principaux de la représentation* (Paris: Alcan, 1907, then PUF), 75 ff.

and absolutely homogeneous, it would serve no purpose and would offer no foothold for thought. Spatial representation basically consists of a primary coordination of the data of sensory experience. But this coordination would be impossible if the parts of space were qualitatively equivalent, if they were really interchangeable. In order to arrange things spatially, we must be able to situate them differently, putting some on the right, others on the left, some above, others below, north or south, east or west, and so on, just as to arrange states of consciousness temporally it must be possible to situate them at definite dates. In other words, space would not be what it is if it were not, like time, divided and differentiated. But where do these basic divisions come from? Inherently, there is no right or left, above or below, north or south, and so on. All these distinctions evidently come from the different affective values attributed to these regions. And since all people of the same civilization conceive of space in the same way, it is clear that these affective values and the distinctions that depend on them are also held in common; this implies, almost of necessity, that they are social in origin.¹

Moreover, in some cases this social character is made manifest. There are societies in Australia and North America in which space is conceived in the form of a vast circle because the encampment itself is circular,² and the spatial circle is divided just like a tribal circle and in its image. There are as many regions as there are clans in the tribe, and it is the place occupied by the clans inside 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 Zuni, for example, the pueblo consists of seven sections; each of these sections is made up of a group of clans that were once united, probably a single clan that was eventually subdivided. Now, space also consists of seven regions, and each of these seven sections of the world is intimately related to a section of the pueblo, in other words, to a

¹ Otherwise, in order to explain this agreement we would have to say that all individuals, due to their psychosomatic make-up, are spontaneously affected in the same way by different parts of space. This is highly unlikely since the different regions are affectively neutral. Moreover, divisions of space vary in different societies, which is proof that they are not based exclusively on human nature.

² See Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, 'De quelques formes primitives de classification', *L'Année sociologique*, 6 (1903), 47 ff.

group of clans.¹ 'Thus', says Cushing, 'one division is considered to be in relation with the north; another represents the west, another the south, etc.'² Each section of the pueblo has its characteristic symbolic colour, and each region of space has exactly the same colour that belongs to its corresponding section. Over time, the number of primary clans has varied, and the number of regions of space has varied in the same way. Thus, social organization has been the model for spatial organization, which is like a tracing of it. Far from being inherent in human nature in general, there is not even any distinction of right and left that is not, in all likelihood, the product of religious, hence collective, representations.

Analogous proof concerning notions of genus, strength, personality, and efficacy will be found below. We may well ask whether even the notion of contradiction may not depend on social conditions. This seems probable because its hold on thought has varied according to epochs 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 this principle has no part: these systems are the mythologies, from the crudest to the most refined.³ In mythologies we forever encounter beings who simultaneously possess the most contradictory attributes, who are at once one and many, material and spiritual, who can be infinitely subdivided without losing anything essential. In mythology it is axiomatic that the part is equal to the whole. These historical variations of the rule that seems to govern our present logic prove that, far from being inscribed from time immemorial in man's mental make-up, the rule of non-contradiction depends, at least in part, on factors that are historical and consequently social. We do not know exactly what they are, but we can assume they exist.⁴

Once this hypothesis is accepted, the problem of knowledge is

¹ Durkheim and Mauss, 'De quelques formes primitives', 34 ff.

² Frank Hamilton Cushing, 'Outlines of Zuni Creation Myths', in the *13th Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington, 1896), 367 ff.

³ We do not mean to say that the principle of identity is absent from mythological thought, but that it departs from it more often and more openly than does scientific thinking. Conversely, we shall show that science cannot help but violate this principle, even while conforming to it more scrupulously than religion does. In this respect, as in many others, the difference between science and religion is merely one of degree. But though we should not exaggerate these differences, they are nevertheless significant enough to be noteworthy.

⁴ This hypothesis has already been expressed by the founders of *Volkerpsychologie*.*

posed in new terms. Until now, two contrasting doctrines prevailed. For some, the categories of understanding cannot be derived from experience: they are logically prior to it and condition it. They are conceived as simple givens, irreducible and immanent in the human mind by virtue of its inherent make-up. This is why they are called *a priori*. For others, by contrast, these categories are constructed, made of bits and pieces, and it is the individual who forges this construction.¹

But both solutions present serious difficulties. If we adopt the empiricist thesis, we must strip the categories 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 since they apply to everything that is real, and while they are not attached to any particular object, they are equally independent of any individual subject. They are the common ground where all minds meet. Moreover, minds necessarily meet there, since reason, which is none other than the whole set of fundamental categories, is invested with an authority we cannot evade at will. When we try to rebel against it, to free ourselves of some of these essential notions, we run into sharp resistance. So not only are these categories independent of us, they impose themselves on us.

But the characteristics of empirical data are quite the opposite. A sensation, an image is always attached to a definite object or to a collection of such objects, and expresses the momentary state of a particular consciousness. It is essentially individual and subjective. Besides, we are free to do as we like with representations that originate in this way. Of course, when our sensations are immediate, they impose themselves on us *in fact*. But *by rights* we are their masters, free to conceive of them otherwise and to picture them in a different order from the one in which they were produced. Nothing binds us to them as long as considerations of another kind do not intervene. So we have two sorts of knowledge that are like opposite poles of

¹ Even in Herbert Spencer's theory, the categories are constructed from individual experience. From this perspective, the only possible difference between ordinary empiricism and evolutionary empiricism is that according to the latter, the results of individual experience are consolidated by heredity. But this consolidation adds nothing essential; no element enters into their composition that does not originate in the individual's experience. And in this theory, the necessity with which categories impose themselves on us in the present is the result of an illusion, a superstitious prejudice deeply rooted in the organism but ungrounded in the nature of things.

intelligence. Under these conditions, to reduce reason to experience is to conjure it away, for the universality and necessity that characterize it are reduced to pure appearance, illusions that can be practically useful but correspond to nothing in things themselves. Consequently, all objective reality is removed from the logical life which these categories function to regulate and organize. Classical empiricism verges on irrationalism, and perhaps it should be labelled as such.

Despite the meaning usually attached to labels, the apriorists are more respectful of the facts. Because they do not take it as self-evident that the categories are made of the same elements as our sentient representations, they are not bound systematically to impoverish them, emptying them of all real content and reducing them to mere verbal artifice. On the contrary, they leave them with all their defining characteristics. The apriorists are rationalists; they believe the world has a logical aspect that reason eminently expresses. To do this, however, they must attribute to the mind a certain power of transcending experience and adding to what is immediately given; but they neither explain nor justify this singular power. Merely to say that it is inherent in the nature of human intelligence is not an explanation. They would have to suggest where this surprising prerogative comes from and how we can see relations in things that are not revealed by observation. To say that experience itself is possible only on this condition is to shift the problem, perhaps, but not to resolve it. The point is to know why experience is not enough but presupposes conditions that are external and prior to it, and how it is that these conditions emerge in the appropriate time and manner. To answer these questions, people have sometimes imagined, beyond the reason of individuals, a superior and perfect reason from which individual reason would emanate and, through a sort of mystic participation, derive its marvellous faculty. This is what we call divine reason. This hypothesis, however, has the serious drawback of being inaccessible to experimental control, so it does not meet the requirements of a scientific hypothesis. Moreover, the categories of human thought are never fixed in a definite form. They are made, unmade, and remade incessantly; they vary according to time and place. By contrast, divine reason is immutable. How could that immutability account for such incessant variation?

These are the two conceptions that have collided for centuries; and if the debate drags on, it is because, quite honestly, the arguments

on both sides are more or less equivalent. If reason is only a form of individual experience, there is no more reason. On the other hand, if its self-proclaimed powers are acknowledged but unaccounted for, then it seems to lie beyond the boundaries of nature and science. Faced with these contradictory objections, the mind hesitates. But if we accept the social origin of categories, a new perspective becomes possible that should help us avoid these contrary difficulties.

The basic thesis of apriorism is that knowledge is formed from two kinds of elements that are not interchangeable, two distinct and superimposed strata, as it were.¹ Our hypothesis endorses this principle. The kinds of knowledge called empirical—the only kind that theorists of empiricism have ever used to construct reason—are those which the direct action of objects initiates in our minds. These are individual states, then, that are entirely explained² by the psychic nature of the individual. But if the categories of thought are essentially collective, as we believe, they translate in the first instance states of the collectivity. They depend on the way this collectivity is constituted and organized, on its morphology, its religious, moral, and economic institutions, and so on. The distance between these two kinds of representations, then, separates the individual from the social, and the second can no more be derived from the first than society can be derived from the individual, the whole from the part, the complex from the simple.³ Society is a reality *sui generis*;^{*} it has

¹ It may be surprising that we should not define apriorism by the hypothesis of innateness. But in fact this idea plays only a secondary role in the doctrine. It is a simplistic way of representing the fact that rational knowledge cannot be reduced to empirical givens. To say that rational knowledge is innate is merely a positive way of saying that it is not a product of experience as it is usually conceived.

² At least to the extent that there are individual, and so wholly empirical, representations. But in fact there is probably no instance in which these elements are not closely connected.

³ This irreducibility, moreover, should not be understood in an absolute sense. We do not mean that there is nothing in empirical representations that relates to rational representations, or that there is nothing in the individual that might be regarded as relating to social life. If experience were completely foreign to all that is rational, reason could not be applied to it. Similarly, if the psychic nature of the individual were absolutely resistant to social life, society would be impossible. Therefore a complete analysis of the categories of thought should try to find just these germs of rationality in individual consciousness. We shall return to this point in our Conclusion. All we want to establish here is that there is a distance between these vague germs of reason and reason proper comparable to the gulf that separates the properties of mineral elements from which life is formed and the characteristic properties of life once it has taken shape.

its own features which are not found, or not found in the same form, in the rest of the world. The representations that express it are therefore something entirely different from purely individual representations, and we can be certain in advance that the first add something to the second.

The very way these two kinds of representations are formed is the basis of their differentiation. Collective representations are the product of a vast cooperative effort that extends not only through space but over time; their creation has involved a multitude of different minds associating, mingling, combining their ideas and feelings—the accumulation of generations of experience and knowledge. A very special intellectuality, infinitely richer and more complex than that of the individual, is concentrated in them. We can understand, then, how reason has the power to go beyond the range of empirical knowledge. It owes this power not to some mysterious virtue but simply to the fact that, as a well-known formula has it, man is twofold. Within him are two beings: an individual being that originates in the organism and whose sphere of action is strictly limited by this fact; and a social being that represents within us the higher reality of the intellectual and moral order that we know through observation—by which I mean society. In the realm of practice, this duality of our nature makes it impossible to reduce a moral ideal to a utilitarian motive; and in the realm of thought, this duality makes it impossible to reduce reason to individual experience. Because he participates in society, the individual naturally transcends himself when he thinks and when he acts.

This same social character allows us to understand why categories are necessary. We say that an idea is necessary when, because of some internal quality, it imposes itself on the mind without any additional proof. There is something in it, then, that compels the intellect, that encourages acceptance without previous examination. Apriorism postulates this unusual capacity but does not explain it; for to say that the categories of understanding are necessary because they are indispensable to the functioning of thought is simply to repeat that they are necessary. But if their origins are as we have described, their ascendancy is no longer surprising. Indeed, they express the most general relations that exist between things; broader than all our other notions, they dominate every aspect of our intellectual life. If at any given moment men did not agree on these essential ideas, if they had

no homogeneous concept of time, space, causality, number, and so on, then any agreement between minds, and therefore all common life, would become impossible. So society cannot abandon these categories to the free will of particular individuals without abandoning itself. To live, society needs not only a degree of moral conformity but a minimum of logical conformity as well. Therefore, to prevent dissident views it leans on its members with all the weight of its authority. What happens when a mind openly departs from these norms of all thought? Society no longer considers that mind human in the full sense of the word, and treats it accordingly. This is why when we try, even deep inside ourselves, to shake off these fundamental notions, we feel that we are not completely free, that something resists us, inside and outside. Outside us, it is opinion that judges us; but further, since society is also represented inside us, it sets itself against these revolutionary impulses from within. We have the feeling that if we abandon these constraints, our thought will cease to be truly human. This seems to be the origin of the very special authority inherent in reason that makes us confidently accept its suggestions. This is the authority of society¹ colouring certain ways of thinking that are the indispensable conditions of all common action. So the necessity with which the categories of thought impose themselves on us is not merely the effect of simple habits whose yoke we might slip off with a little effort; nor is it a physical or metaphysical necessity, since these categories change according to time and place. It is a particular kind of moral necessity that is to intellectual life what moral obligation is to the will.²

But if categories at first translate only social states, does it not follow that they can be applied to the rest of nature only as

¹ It has often been noticed that social confusions multiply mental confusions. This is additional proof that logical discipline is one aspect of social discipline. The first is relaxed when the second weakens.

² There is an analogy between this logical necessity and moral obligation, but they are not identical, at least at present. Today society treats criminals differently from the mentally handicapped. This is evidence that, despite important similarities, the authority attached to logical norms and the authority inherent in moral norms are not of the same kind. They are different species of the same genus. It would be interesting to investigate the nature and source of this difference. It is probably not fundamental, since for a long time public consciousness had trouble distinguishing the insane from the delinquent. We confine ourselves to raising the question. This example highlights the numerous problems raised by the analysis of these notions, which are generally thought to be elementary and simple but are actually quite complex.

metaphors? If their sole purpose is to express social things, they could be extended to other areas only by convention. Insofar as they serve us for thinking about the physical or biological world, they would only have the value of artificial symbols, practically useful perhaps, but with no connection to reality. Thus we would return to nominalism and empiricism by another route.

But to interpret a sociological theory of knowledge in this way is to forget that if society is a specific reality, still it is not an empire within an empire; it is part of nature, indeed its highest embodiment. The social realm is a natural realm that differs from others only in its greater complexity. Now, it is impossible that nature at its most basic should be radically different in other areas. The fundamental relations that exist between things—which these categories are designed to express—should be essentially similar in different realms. If they appear more obvious in the social world—for reasons we shall investigate¹—they must certainly be found elsewhere, if in more veiled forms. Society makes them more obvious but has no exclusive rights to them. That is why notions that have been elaborated on the model of social things can help us think about other sorts of things. In any case, if these notions are deflected from their first meaning and play, in a sense, the role of symbols, they are well-grounded symbols. If these concepts involve artifice simply because they are constructed, it is an artifice that ever more closely approximates nature.² Just because ideas of time, space, genus, cause, and personality are constructed from social elements, we must not, therefore, conclude that they have no objective value. On the contrary, their social origin suggests rather that they have some basis in the nature of things.³

¹ This matter is treated in the Conclusion to this book.

² Therefore the rationalism immanent in a sociological theory of knowledge lies somewhere between empiricism and classical apriorism. For the first, the categories are purely artificial constructions; for the second they are, on the contrary, natural givens; for us they are, in a sense, works of art, but an art that imitates nature with ever increasing perfection.

³ For example, the category of time is based on the rhythm of social life; but if there is a rhythm of collective life, we can be sure that there is another rhythm in the life of the individual and, more generally, in the life of the universe. The first is only more marked and apparent than the others. Similarly, we shall see that the notion of genus was based on that of the human group. But if men form natural groups, we can assume that groups exist among things that are at once analogous and different. These natural groups of things are genera and species.

If there is still a consensus that we cannot attribute a social origin to the categories of

Newly formulated, the theory of knowledge seems to unite the opposite advantages of the two rival theories without any of their drawbacks. It preserves all the essential principles of apriorism but is inspired by that spirit of positivism which empiricism tried to satisfy. It grants reason its special power but accounts for it without leaving the observable world. It affirms as real the duality of our intellectual life but explains it by natural causes. Categories are no longer considered primary facts inaccessible to analysis; and yet they remain sufficiently complex that analyses as simplistic as the empiricist variety could not possibly be right. They no longer seem to be simple notions anyone can spin out of his personal observations, unfortunately complicated by the popular imagination; but on the contrary, artful instruments of thought that human groups have laboured to forge over the centuries, and in which they have invested their best intellectual capital.¹ They embody a large part of human history. This means that to succeed in understanding and judging these categories we must have recourse to new procedures.

To know what those conceptions are made of that we have not made ourselves, it is not enough simply to consult our own consciousness; we must look outside ourselves, we must observe history, we must establish a whole science, and a complex one, which can advance only slowly, by collective effort. The present work is an attempt to make some fragmentary contributions to that science. Without making these matters the direct subject of our study, we shall take advantage of every possible opportunity to capture the beginnings of those notions in particular that, while religious in origin, must none the less remain at the basis of human mentality.

thought without depriving them of all speculative value, this is because society is still too often regarded as something unnatural; and so it is concluded that representations expressing it express nothing about nature. But this conclusion is no more valid than the principle.

¹ This is why it is legitimate to compare the categories with tools; for the tool is also accumulated material capital. Moreover, the three notions of tool, category, and institution are closely related.

BOOK I

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

CHAPTER I

A DEFINITION OF THE RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON AND OF RELIGION¹

IN order to identify the simplest and most primitive religion known to us from observation, we must first define what is meant by a religion. If we do not, we might either call a system of ideas and practices religion that are not in the least religious, or bypass religious phenomena without perceiving their true nature. This danger is not imaginary, nor is it just an offering to sterile methodological formalism; because he failed to take this precaution, Sir James Frazer,* to whom the science of comparative religions is greatly indebted, could not recognize the deeply religious character of beliefs and rites that will be studied below, and in which we now see the seed of humanity's religious life. This is a preliminary matter that must be dealt with first. Not that we could hope to reach the underlying and truly revealing features of religion at this point; these can be determined only at the end of our enquiry. But it is both necessary and possible to indicate a certain number of easily perceived outward signs that allow religious phenomena to be recognized wherever they are met, and that prevent them from being confused with others. We shall turn now to this preliminary process.

For this process to yield the expected results, we must begin by freeing our minds of any preconceived ideas. Men have had to invent a notion of religion well before the science of religions could establish its systematic comparisons. The demands of existence compel all of us, believers and non-believers, somehow to represent those things that we live with, make judgements about, and take into consideration for our conduct. But since these preliminary notions are formed unsystematically, according to the chance events and encounters of life, they are discredited and must be firmly set aside

¹ We have already tried to define the phenomenon of religion in a work published in *L'Année sociologique* (3: 1 ff.). As we shall see, the definition given there differs from the one now being proposed. At the end of this chapter we explain the reasons for these modifications, which do not, however, imply any essential change in the conception of the facts.

in the examination that follows. The elements of the definition we require are not to be found in our prejudices, our passions, or our habits, but in reality itself.

So let us confront that reality. Leaving aside any conception of religion in general, let us consider religions in their concrete reality, and let us try to discover what they have in common; for religion can be defined only as a function of features found wherever there is religion. In this comparison we shall therefore include all religious systems available to us, those present and past, the simplest and most primitive as well as the most recent and refined; for we have no right to keep some and exclude others, and no logical means to do it. To anyone who views religion as merely a natural expression of human activity, all religions without exception are instructive: they all express man in their own way, and can therefore help us to reach a better understanding of this aspect of our nature. Besides, we have seen that studying the form religion takes among the most civilized peoples is hardly the best approach.¹

But before tackling the question itself and in order to free the mind of those common conceptions whose hold can prevent us from seeing things as they are, it is appropriate to examine several of the most current definitions in which these prejudices are expressed.

I

One notion generally considered characteristic of everything religious is the notion of the supernatural. This means any order of things beyond our understanding: the supernatural is the world of mystery, the unknowable, the incomprehensible. Religion would then be a kind of speculation on all that escapes science and clear thinking in general. 'Religions', says Spencer,* 'that are diametrically opposite in their dogmas tacitly agree on recognizing that the world, with all it contains and all that surrounds it, is a mystery seeking an explanation.' In his view, religions consist of 'the belief in the omnipresence of something that goes beyond the intellect'.² Similarly,

¹ See above. We shall not go on at greater length about the necessity of these definitions or the method used to arrive at them. These are found in my *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1895), 43 ff. Cf. *Le Suicide* (Paris: Alcan, 1897, then PUF), 1 ff.

² Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (New York: D. Appleton, 1862), 37. [Durkheim used the French translation (Paris: Alcan, 1902), 38-9.]

Max Müller* saw all religion as 'an effort to conceive of the inconceivable and to express the inexpressible, an aspiration toward the infinite'.¹

True, the feeling of mystery has played an important role in certain religions, notably Christianity. Yet the importance of this role has varied considerably at different moments in Christian history. There were periods when this notion of mystery became secondary and even vanished altogether. For men of the seventeenth century, for example, dogma was not a challenge to reason. Faith was easily reconciled with science and philosophy, and thinkers like Pascal, who had a vivid sense of the profound obscurity of things, were so out of step with their times that they were misunderstood by their contemporaries.² It might be rather hasty, then, to make an idea that is subject to such eclipses the essential element of even the Christian religion.

In any case, this idea appears very late in the history of religions. It is completely alien not only to the peoples we call primitive but also to those who have not reached a certain degree of intellectual culture. Of course, when we see them attribute extraordinary virtues to trivial objects, or peopling the universe with singular principles made up of the most disparate elements and endowed with a sort of ubiquity difficult to imagine, we are ready to find an air of mystery in these ideas. It seems to us that men have resigned themselves to ideas so troubling to our modern reason only because they could not find more rational ones. In reality, however, the explanations that astonish us seem supremely simple to the primitive. He sees them not as a kind of *ultima ratio** to which intelligence resigns itself only as a last resort, but as the most immediate way of conceptualizing and understanding what he observes around him. For him, there is nothing strange in using one's voice or gestures to command the elements, to halt or advance the progress of the stars, to make the rain fall or not, and so on. The rites he uses to ensure the fertility of the soil or the fecundity of animal species that provide him with food are no more irrational, in his view, than the technical procedures our agronomists

¹ Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religions* (London: Longmans, 1873), 18. Cf. *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* (London: Longmans, 1878), 23.

² The same mentality is also found in the period of scholasticism, as witness the formula by which the philosophy of the time defined itself: *Fides quaerens intellectum* [Faith in search of intellect].

use for the same purpose. The forces he sets in motion by these various means do not seem especially mysterious to him. Certainly these forces differ from those the modern scientist conceives and teaches us to use; they act differently and cannot be controlled by the same procedures; but for the man who believes in them, they are no less intelligible than weight or electricity is to the physicist today. Moreover, we shall see in the course of this work that the notion of natural forces is probably derived from the notion of religious forces, so there cannot be the same gulf between them that separates the rational from the irrational. Even the fact that religious forces are often conceived as spiritual entities, as conscious wills, is no proof of their irrationality. Reason does not reject a priori the idea that so-called inanimate bodies, like human bodies, may be moved by intelligences, although contemporary science does not easily accommodate this hypothesis. When Leibniz imagined the external world as a vast society of minds having only mental relations, he thought he was working as a rationalist, and he saw nothing in this animism that might offend the understanding.

Moreover, the idea of the supernatural, as we understand it, is of recent vintage: it presupposes its opposite, which it negates and which is not at all primitive. In order to call certain phenomena supernatural, one must already have the sense that there is a *natural order of things*, in other words, that the phenomena of the universe are connected to one another according to certain necessary relationships called laws. Once this principle is established, anything that pertains to these laws necessarily appears to be beyond nature, and so beyond reason; for what is natural in this sense is also rational, those necessary relations expressing only the way that things are logically linked. But this notion of universal determinism is very recent; even the greatest thinkers of classical antiquity were never fully aware of it. This idea is a triumph of the empirical sciences; it is their basic postulate and has been demonstrated by their progress. Yet as long as this notion was absent or was not firmly established, the most marvellous events never seemed inconceivable. As long as it was not known that the order of things was immutable and inflexible, as long as it was seen as the work of contingent wills, it seemed natural that these wills or others might modify things arbitrarily. This is why the miraculous interventions which the ancients attributed to their gods were not seen as miracles in the modern sense of the word. They

were beautiful, rare, or terrible spectacles, objects of surprise and wonder (Greek θαύματα, *mirabilia*, *miracula*); they were not seen as glimpses into a mysterious world closed to reason.

This mentality is all the more easily understood since it has not entirely disappeared. While the principle of determinism is now firmly established in the physical and natural sciences, it was introduced into the social sciences only a century ago, and its authority in these fields is still contested. Only a few minds are deeply convinced that societies are subject to necessary laws and constitute a realm of nature. It follows that true miracles are still thought possible. We accept, for example, that a legislator can create an institution out of nothing by the simple exercise of his will, transforming one social system into another, just as believers in so many religions accept that divine will has drawn the world out of nothingness or can arbitrarily transmute some beings into others. As far as social matters are concerned, we still have the mentality of primitives. And yet when it comes to sociology, so many contemporaries are reluctant to give up this old-fashioned idea, though not because the life of societies seems obscure and mysterious to them. Rather, they are so easily satisfied by these explanations that they cling to these illusions which are repeatedly belied by experience, because social matters seem to them the most obvious things in the world; they do not grasp their true obscurity, and they have not yet recognized the need to replicate the painstaking procedures of the natural sciences in order to dispel this darkness. The same state of mind is found at the root of many religious beliefs that surprise us by their simplistic nature. Science, not religion, has taught men that things are complex and difficult to understand.

But, Jevons* replies,¹ the human mind has no need of a scientific culture as such to notice that fixed sequences and a constant order of succession prevail in the world, and to observe that, on the other hand, this order is often broken. The sun is suddenly eclipsed, rain does not fall when it should, the moon takes its time reappearing after its periodic disappearance, and so on. Because these events are outside the ordinary course of things, they are attributed to extraordinary, exceptional—in a word, extra-natural—causes. It is in this

¹ Frank Byron Jevons, *An Introduction to the History of Religion* (London: Methuen, 1902), 15.

form that the idea of the supernatural was born at the beginning of history, and from that moment religious thought acquired its own unique object.

The supernatural is not, however, merely the unforeseen. The novel is as much a part of nature as its opposite. If we assert that phenomena usually succeed one another in a fixed order, we also notice that this order is always approximate, that it is not quite the same at different moments, and that it includes all sorts of exceptions. Our slightest experience teaches us that our expectations are often disappointed, and these disappointments are too frequent to seem extraordinary. Experience contains elements of chance as well as a certain uniformity, so we have no reason to attribute these elements to entirely different forces. To have the idea of the supernatural, it is not enough for us to witness unexpected events; rather, these events must be regarded as impossible—as irreconcilable with an order that seems, rightly or wrongly, to be a necessary part of the nature of things. This notion of a necessary order has been gradually constructed by the empirical sciences; it follows that the opposite notion could not have pre-dated them.

Furthermore, no matter how men have conceived novelties and contingencies revealed by experience, there is nothing in these conceptions that might characterize religion. Religious conceptions aim above all to express and explain not what is exceptional and abnormal but, on the contrary, what is constant and regular. Generally, the gods serve far less to account for monstrosities, oddities, and anomalies, than for the usual course of the universe, the movement of the stars, the rhythm of the seasons, the annual growth of vegetation, the perpetuation of the species, and so on. So the notion of the religious does not coincide with the extraordinary and the unexpected. Jevons replies that this conception of religious forces is not primitive. These forces must first have been imagined to account for disorders and accidents, and only later used to explain the uniformities of nature. But it is hard to see what could have prompted men to assign them such clearly opposite functions. Besides, the hypothesis that sacred beings were first confined to the negative role of disturbers is entirely arbitrary. We shall see, in fact, that beginning with the simplest religions we know, the basic task of sacred beings has been to sustain the normal course of life in a positive way.

Thus the idea of mystery is not original. It is not inherent in man;

man himself has forged this idea with his own hands, along with its contrary. That is why the idea of mystery figures in only a small number of advanced religions. It cannot be made the chief characteristic of religious phenomena, then, without excluding from the definition most of the facts to be defined.

II

Another idea that has frequently been used to define religion is divinity. 'Religion', says Reville, 'is the determination of human life by the feeling of a bond uniting the human mind to the mysterious mind it recognizes as ruling the world and itself, and with which it takes pleasure in feeling united.'¹ If the word divinity is understood in a precise and narrow sense, this definition excludes a multitude of obviously religious facts. The souls of the dead and spirits of every kind and rank, with which the religious imagination of so many peoples has populated nature, are always the object of rites and sometimes even of regular cults; and yet they are not gods strictly speaking. To include them in this definition, however, all we have to do is replace the word 'god' with the more comprehensive term 'spiritual being'. Tylor* has done this: 'In studying systematically 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.²

Spiritual beings must be understood to mean conscious subjects with capacities superior to those of ordinary men; this qualification includes the souls of the dead, genies, and demons, as well as divinities strictly speaking. It is worth noting straight away the particular conception of religion that this definition implies. The only relations we might have with beings of this kind are determined by the nature ascribed to them. These are conscious beings, and we can influence them only as one influences consciousnesses in general, that is, by

¹ Albert Reville, *Prolégomènes à l'histoire des religions* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1881), 34.

² Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1873), i. 491.

psychological means, by trying to convince them or move them, either with words (invocations, prayers) or with offerings and sacrifices. And since the purpose of religion is to regulate our relations with these special beings, religion would be present only where there are prayers, sacrifices, propitiatory rites, and so on. So we would use a very simple criterion to distinguish what is religious from what is not. Frazer systematically applies this criterion, as do certain ethnographers.

But although this definition may seem obvious, given the habits of mind we owe to our religious education, there are a number of facts to which it does not apply that none the less belong to the realm of religion.

In the first place, there are great religions in which the idea of gods and spirits is absent, or plays only a secondary and unobtrusive role. This is the case with Buddhism. Buddhism, says Burnouf, 'stands in opposition to Brahmanism as a moral system without god and an atheism without Nature'.¹ 'It recognizes no god on whom man depends,' says Mr Barth, 'its doctrine is absolutely atheist';² and Oldenberg, on his side, calls it 'a religion without god'.³ Indeed, the essentials of Buddhism can be summed up in four propositions which the faithful call the Four Noble Truths. The first states that the existence of suffering is bound to the perpetual flux of things; the second locates the cause of suffering in desire; the third makes the suppression of desire the only way to end suffering; the fourth enumerates the three stages one must pass through to achieve this suppression: rectitude, meditation, and finally wisdom, the full possession of the doctrine. After passing through these three stages, one comes to the end of the road and achieves deliverance, salvation through Nirvana.

It is true that at least in certain divisions of the Buddhist Church, the Buddha is regarded as a kind of god. He has his temples and has become the object of a cult, albeit a very simple one that consists

¹ Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme indien* (2nd edn., Paris: Maisonneuve, 1876), 464. The last word of the text means that Buddhism does not even accept the existence of an eternal Nature.

² Auguste Barth, *The Religions of India*, trans. Revd J. Wood (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1882), 110.

³ Hermann Oldenberg, *Le Bouddha* (French trans., Paris: Alcan, 1894), 51.

essentially of the offerings of certain flowers and the adoration of relics or sacred images. It is little more than a cult of memory. But this divinization of the Buddha, if that is the right expression, is peculiar to what is 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 currently known facts, to speak of the founder of their doctrine as if he were a man.'¹ They certainly attribute extraordinary powers to the Buddha, superior to those of ordinary mortals; but it was a very ancient belief in India, and very common in many different religions, that a great saint is endowed with exceptional virtues. Yet despite the superhuman faculties often attributed to him, a saint is not a god, any more than a priest or a magician is a god. Besides, according to the greatest scholarly authorities, this kind of theism and the complex mythology that usually goes with it is merely a derivative and deviant form of Buddhism. Buddha was, in the first instance, considered only 'the wisest of men'.² [. . .]

Finally, whatever one thinks of the divinity of Buddha, it remains a conception completely external to what is really basic in Buddhism. Buddhism consists above all of the notion of salvation, and salvation merely requires one to know and practise the good doctrine. That doctrine could not be known, of course, if Buddha had not come to reveal it; but once that revelation was made, the Buddha's work was done. From this moment on, he ceased to be a necessary factor in religious life. The practice of the Four Noble Truths would be possible, then, even if the memory of the man who revealed them should fade. It is quite different from Christianity, which is inconceivable without the ever-present idea and the ever-practised cult of Christ. For it is through the ever-living and continually sacrificed Christ that the community of the faithful continues to communicate with the supreme source of its spiritual life.

What we have just said applies equally to another great Indian religion, Jainism. Moreover, the two doctrines seem to have nearly the same conception of the world and of life. 'Like the Buddhists,' says Barth, 'the Jainists are atheists. They reject the idea of a creator;

¹ Hendrick Kern, *Histoire du bouddhisme dans l'Inde*, vol. i (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1901), 289.

² Burnouf, *Introduction*, 120.

for them the world is eternal and they explicitly deny that a perfect being could exist from all eternity. The Jina has become perfect, but he was not always so.' Like the Buddhists of the north, the Jainists, or at least some of them, have none the less reverted to a kind of deism. The Deccan inscriptions mention a *Jinapati*, a kind of supreme Jina, who is called the first creator; but such language, says the same author, 'conflicts with the most explicit declarations of their most authoritative writers'.¹

Moreover, this indifference to the divine is so pronounced in Buddhism and Jainism because its seeds were already present in Brahmanism, from which both religions derive. At least in some of its forms, Brahmanic speculation issued in 'a frankly materialist and atheist explanation of the universe'.² Over time, the multiple divinities that the peoples of India had first learned to worship merged into a sort of impersonal and abstract principle, the essence of all that exists. Man contains within himself this supreme reality, which no longer has divine personality, or rather he is one with it since nothing exists outside it. To find and unite with this reality, he need not search outside himself for some external support; it is enough to focus on the self and meditate.* [. . .] These are great religions in which invocations, propitiations, sacrifices, and prayers, strictly speaking, are far from central and so do not present the distinctive mark by which we claim to recognize specifically religious expressions.

Even in deistic religions we find a great number of rites that are entirely independent of any idea of gods or spiritual beings. First of all, there are a multitude of prohibitions. The Bible, for example, commands women to live in isolation for a specified period each month,³ and requires the same sort of isolation during childbirth.⁴ It forbids yoking together the ox and the ass, or wearing clothing in which wool is mixed with linen,⁵ though it is impossible to see what role the belief in Yahweh can have played in these prohibitions. He is absent from all the prohibited relations, and could have no interest in them. The same can be said of most dietary restrictions. Such

¹ Barth, *Religions of India*, 146.

² A. Barth, 'Religions de l'Inde', in *Encyclopédie des sciences religieuses* (Paris: Sandor & Fischbacher, 1877-82), vi. 548.

³ Leviticus 15: 19-24.

⁴ Leviticus 12.

⁵ Deuteronomy 22: 10-11.

restrictions are not peculiar to the Hebrews but are found in various forms in many religions.

It is true that these rites are purely negative, but they are none the less religious. In addition, there are other rites that require the believer to perform positive acts of a similar nature. They act on their own, and their efficacy does not depend on divine power; they mechanically promote the effects which are their justification. They involve neither prayers nor offerings addressed to a being on whose goodwill the expected result depends; rather this result is achieved by the automatic operation of the ritual. [. . .]

In every cult there are practices that act by themselves, through a virtue of their own, without any god mediating between the individual who executes the rite and the goal pursued. When the Jew stirred the air at the feast of Tabernacles by shaking willow branches in a certain rhythm, it was to make the wind rise and rain fall. He believed that the rite produced the desired result automatically, provided it was correctly performed. Furthermore, this explains the primary importance attached by nearly every cult to the material aspect of ceremonies. This religious formalism—probably the first form of legal formalism—derives from the fact that, containing the source of their own efficacy, the formula to be pronounced and the movements to be executed would fail if they did not follow precisely those already hallowed by success.

Thus there are rites without gods, and there are even rites from which gods derive. Not all religious qualities emanate from divine personalities, and there are cultic practices that have other goals than man's union with a divinity. Religion therefore transcends the idea of gods or spirits, and so cannot be defined exclusively as a function of that idea.

III

Setting these definitions aside, let us address the problem directly.

First, let us note that all these formulas attempt to express the nature of religion as a whole. They proceed as if religion formed a kind of seamless entity, although in reality it is a whole formed of parts, a more or less complex system of myths, dogmas, rites, and ceremonies. Now, a whole can be defined only in relation to the parts that comprise it, so it is more methodical to try and characterize the

elementary phenomena that generate any religion than to characterize the system they produce. This method seems even more compelling in light of the fact that religious phenomena exist that do not result in any specific religion. These provide the material of folklore. In general they are the debris of vanished religions, disorganized remnants; but some are formed spontaneously under the influence of local causes. In Europe, Christianity tried to absorb and assimilate them, giving them a Christian coloration. None the less, there are many that have persisted until recently, or that still persist more or less independently: maypole festivals, the summer solstice, carnival, various beliefs relating to genies and local demons, and so on. A definition that fails to take them into account would not cover everything religious.

Religious phenomena fall quite naturally into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the second are fixed modes of actions. These two classes of phenomena differ as much as thought differs from action.

Rites can be defined and distinguished from other human practices, notably moral practices, only by the special nature of their object. A moral law, like a rite, prescribes ways of acting, but these address objects of a different kind. Therefore, to characterize the rite itself, the object of the rite must first be characterized. Now, the special nature of this object is expressed in belief. The rite can be defined, then, only after defining the belief.

All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present a common quality: they presuppose a classification of things—the real or ideal things that men represent for themselves—into two classes, two opposite kinds, generally designated by two distinct terms effectively translated by the words *profane* and *sacred*. The division of the world into two comprehensive domains, one sacred, the other profane, is the hallmark of religious thought. Beliefs, myths, gnomonic spirits, and legends are either representations or systems of representation that express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers attributed to them, their history, their relations with each other and with profane things. But sacred things should not be taken to mean simply those personal beings we call gods or spirits. A rock, a tree, a spring, a stone, a piece of wood, a house, in other words anything at all, can be sacred. A rite can have this sacred character as well; in fact, no rite exists that does not have it to some degree. There

are words, speeches, and formulas that can be spoken only by consecrated persons; there are gestures and movements that cannot be executed by everyone. If, according to mythology, Vedic sacrifice was not just a way of winning favour with the gods but actually created them, that is because it possessed a virtue comparable to those of the most sacred beings. The circle of sacred objects, then, cannot be fixed once and for all; its scope varies endlessly from one religion to another. Buddhism is a religion because, in the absence of gods, it accepts the existence of sacred things, namely the Four Noble Truths and the practices that derive from them.¹

Up to this point we have confined ourselves to listing a certain number of sacred things as examples. Now we must indicate the general features that distinguish them from profane things.

One might be tempted to define them first by the place they are generally assigned in the hierarchy of beings. They are regarded as superior in dignity and power to profane things, and particularly to man when he is merely a man and does not himself participate in the sacred. He is represented, in fact, as occupying a lower and dependent place in relation to sacred things; and this representation is certainly not inaccurate. But nothing about it is truly characteristic of the sacred. It is not enough to make one thing subordinate to make the other sacred in relation to it. Slaves depend on their masters, subjects on their king, soldiers on their chiefs, the lower classes on the governing classes, the miser on his gold, the ambitious on power and those who have it. Now, if we sometimes say that a person's religion consists of beings or things which he considers eminently valuable and in some way superior to himself, it is clear that in all such cases the word is meant metaphorically, and that there is nothing in these relations that is properly religious in the strict sense of the term.²

On the other hand, we must not lose sight of the fact that there are things that man feels relatively comfortable with, though they are supremely sacred. An amulet has a sacred character, and yet it does not inspire exceptional respect. Even face to face with his gods, man is not always in such a markedly inferior state; he often uses what

¹ Not to speak of the sage and the saint who practise these truths and are for this reason sacred.

² This is not to say that these relations cannot take on a religious character, but they do not necessarily do so.

amounts to physical force on them to achieve his desire. He beats the fetish when he is displeased, only to be reconciled with it if it becomes more compliant to the wishes of its worshipper. To make rain, stones are thrown into the spring or in the sacred lake where the rain god is supposed to live; it is believed that this will force him to come out and show himself. Moreover, while it is true that man depends on his gods, the dependence is mutual. The gods also need man; without offerings and sacrifices, they would die. We shall have occasion to show that this dependence of the gods on their faithful is maintained even in the most refined religions.

However, if a purely hierarchical distinction is both too general and too vague a criterion, the only way to define the relation between the sacred and the profane is their heterogeneity. This heterogeneity suffices to characterize this classification of things and to distinguish it from any other for one particular reason: *it is absolute*. There is no other example in the history of human thought of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another. The traditional opposition between good and evil is nothing by comparison; good and evil are opposite species of the same genus, namely morality, just as health and sickness are merely two different aspects of the same order of facts—life. By contrast, the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as separate genera, as two worlds that have nothing in common. The energies at play in one are not merely different in their degree of intensity; they are different in kind. This opposition is conceived differently in different religions. In some, localizing these two kinds of things in distinct regions of the physical universe seems sufficient to separate them; in others, sacred things are cast into an ideal and transcendent setting, while the material world is left entirely to others. But while the forms of the contrast vary, the fact is universal.

This does not mean that a being can never pass from one world to the other; but when it happens, the way this passage occurs highlights the essential duality of the two realms. It implies a true metamorphosis. This is demonstrated particularly well in rites of initiation, which are practised by a great many peoples. The initiation is a long series of ceremonies whose purpose is to introduce the young man to religious life: for the first time he leaves the purely profane world, where he spent his childhood, to enter the circle of

sacred things. Now, this change of status is conceived, not as the simple and normal development of pre-existing seeds, but as a transformation *totius substantiae*.* It is said that at this moment the young man dies, that the particular person he was ceases to exist and is instantaneously replaced by another. He is reborn in a new form. Appropriate ceremonies are performed to bring about this death and rebirth, which are not merely symbolic but are taken literally. This seems to be proof of a rupture between the profane being he was and the religious being he becomes.

This heterogeneity is so great it often degenerates into a serious antagonism. The two worlds are not only conceived as separate, but as hostile and jealous rivals. Since a man can belong fully to one realm only if he is entirely out of the other, he is exhorted to withdraw completely from the profane to live an exclusively religious life. Monasticism artificially organizes a closed setting, parallel to and apart from the natural setting in which most men live the life of their times. And there is mystic asceticism, whose purpose is to sever man's last remaining attachments to the profane world. Indeed, there is religious suicide, the logical culmination of this asceticism, since the only way of escaping profane life entirely is to escape life altogether.

The opposition of these two genera is translated externally by a visible sign that allows ready recognition of this very special classification wherever it exists. Because man's notion of the sacred is always and everywhere separated from his notion of the profane by a sort of logical gulf between the two, the mind radically rejects any mingling or even contact between the things that correspond to these realms. Such promiscuous mingling or even contact dangerously contradicts the state of dissociation in which these ideas are found in human consciousness. The sacred thing is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity. This prohibition surely makes all communication impossible between the two worlds; for if the profane could enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would serve no purpose. Now, this contact is always in itself a delicate operation that requires precautions and a more or less complicated initiation; but it is not even possible unless the profane loses its specific features and becomes sacred to some extent. The two genera cannot be brought together and still maintain their separate natures.

Now we have a first criterion of religious beliefs. Within these two fundamental genera, of course, there are secondary species that are also more or less incompatible with each other. But what is characteristic of the religious phenomenon is that it always assumes a binary division of the known and knowable universe into two genera that include all that exists but radically exclude each other. Sacred things are those things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are those things to which such prohibitions apply and which must keep their distance from what is sacred. Religious beliefs are representations that express the nature of sacred things and the relations they sustain among themselves 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 sustain relations of coordination and subordination between them, forming a system that has a certain unity but does not enter into any other system of the same kind, this set of beliefs and corresponding rites constitutes a religion. By this definition, a religion is not necessarily contained in a single and consistent idea, and cannot be reduced to a unique principle that may vary according to circumstances but is basically identical everywhere; rather it is a whole formed from distinct and relatively individualized parts. Every homogeneous group of sacred things, or indeed every sacred thing of any importance, constitutes a centre of organization around which a group of beliefs and rites, a particular cult, gravitates. And no religion, however unified, fails to recognize the plurality of sacred things. Even Christianity, at least in its Catholic form, includes, in addition to the divine being—who is three in one, besides—the Virgin, angels, saints, souls of the dead, and so on. And a religion cannot usually be reduced to a single cult but consists of a system of cults that have a certain autonomy. Sometimes they are ranked hierarchically and subordinated to some dominant cult into which they are eventually absorbed; but sometimes they simply exist side by side in a kind of confederation. The religion we are about to study will provide a good example of this sort of organization.

At the same time, groups of religious phenomena may exist that do not belong to any constituted religion because they are not or are no longer integrated into a religious system. When such a cult persists for any particular reason, while the whole to which it belonged

has vanished, it will survive only in fragments. This is what has happened to many agrarian cults that have survived in folklore. In some cases what persists in this form is not even a cult but a simple ceremony or a particular rite.

Although this definition is only preliminary, it already suggests a way to pose the problem that necessarily dominates the science of religions.* If one believes that sacred beings are distinguished merely by the greater intensity of their powers, the question of how men could entertain this idea is a rather simple one: merely identify those forces whose exceptional energy could strike the human mind vividly enough to inspire religious feelings. But if, as we have tried to establish, sacred things differ in nature from profane things, if they have a different essence, the problem is quite complex. We must ask ourselves, then, what compelled man to see the world as two heterogeneous and incompatible worlds, though nothing in palpable experience seems to have suggested the idea of such a radical duality.

IV

This definition, however, is not yet complete since it applies equally to two orders of things which, though related, must none the less be distinguished: magic and religion.

Magic also consists of beliefs and rites. Like religion, it has its myths and its dogmas, but they are more rudimentary, probably because in pursuing technical and utilitarian aims, magic does not waste time in pure speculation. Magic also has its ceremonies, sacrifices, purification rituals, prayers, chants, and dances. The beings invoked by the magician, the forces he puts into play, are not only similar in nature to the forces and beings addressed by religion but often identical. Beginning with the most primitive societies, the souls of the dead are essentially sacred things and the objects of religious rites. But at the same time they have played a considerable role in magic. In Australia as well as in Melanesia, in ancient Greece as well as among Christian peoples, the souls of the dead, their bones and their hair, are among the magician's most useful tools. Demons are also commonly used in the performance of magic. Now, demons, too, are beings surrounded by prohibitions; they too are separated, living in a world apart, and it is often difficult to distinguish them from gods proper. Even in Christianity, isn't the devil a fallen god? And

apart from his origins, does he not have a religious character by virtue of the fact that hell, which he rules, is an indispensable mechanism of the Christian religion? The magician even invokes regular and official divinities. Sometimes these are the gods of a foreign people; for example, the Greek magicians called for the intervention of Egyptian, Assyrian, or Jewish gods. Sometimes they are even the national gods: Hecate and Diana were the objects of a magic cult; the Virgin, Christ, and the saints have been used in the same way by Christian magicians.¹

Must we say, then, that magic cannot be clearly distinguished from religion? That magic is full of religion, just as religion is full of magic, and therefore it is impossible to separate them and define them individually? What makes this thesis hard to sustain is the marked repugnance of religion for magic and, similarly, the hostility of magic toward religion. Magic takes a kind of professional pleasure in profaning holy things;² its rites are the mirror image of religious ceremonies.³ On its side, though religion has not always condemned and prohibited magical rites, it generally views them with disfavour. As Hubert and Mauss point out, there is something basically anti-religious in the operations of the magician.⁴ So whatever the relations between these two institutions, it is difficult for them not somehow to be opposed. And in order to limit our research to religion and stop at the point where magic begins, it is all the more urgent to discover what makes them distinct.

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

Religious beliefs proper are always held by a defined collectivity that professes them and practises the rites that go with them. These beliefs are not only embraced by all the members of this collectivity as individuals, they belong to the group and unite it. The individuals who make up this group feel bound to one another by their common beliefs. A society whose members are united because they share a common conception of the sacred world and its relation to the

¹ See Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, 'Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie', *L'Année sociologique*, 7 (1904), 83-4.

² For example, the Host is profaned in the Black Mass.

³ One turns one's back to the altar, or one circles around the altar beginning on the left instead of on the right.

⁴ Hubert and Mauss, 'Esquisse', 19.

profane world, and who translate this common conception into identical practices, is what we call a church.* Now historically, we find no religion without a church. Sometimes the church is narrowly national, sometimes it reaches beyond borders; sometimes it embraces an entire people (Rome, Athens, the Hebrews), sometimes it embraces only a fraction of a population (Christian societies since the advent of Protestantism); sometimes it is directed by a body of priests, sometimes it is almost entirely lacking any official governing body. But wherever we observe religious life, its foundation is a defined group. Even so-called private cults, like domestic or guild cults, satisfy this condition, for they are always celebrated by a collectivity: the family or the guild. And furthermore, as these religions are usually special forms of a more general religion that embraces the totality of life, these restricted churches are in reality merely coteries within a greater church which is, because of this very scope, all the more deserving of the name.¹

When it comes to magic, the situation is quite different. It is probably true that magical beliefs are always in vogue. They are often widespread among large sectors of the population, and there are even people who believe in magic as much as they do in religion proper. But magic does not bind its followers to one another and unite them in a single group living the same life. *A church of magic does not exist.* Between the magician and his followers, and between these individuals themselves, there are no lasting bonds that make them members of a moral body like the one formed by worshippers of the same god. The magician has a clientele, not a church, and his clients may well be entirely unrelated and even unaware of each other; even their relations with him are generally accidental and transitory, like those of a patient with his doctor. The official and public character with which he is sometimes invested makes no difference. The fact that he functions in daylight does not bind him in a more regular and lasting way to those who use his services.

It is true that magicians sometimes form societies; they may gather more or less periodically to celebrate certain rites together: we know the centrality of witches' sabbaths in European folklore. But first, these associations are clearly not indispensable to the

¹ The name 'church' is ordinarily applied only to a group whose common beliefs refer to a sphere of less specialized things.

functioning of magic; indeed, they are rare and rather exceptional. The magician has no need to meet with his colleagues to practise his art. Indeed, he is usually a recluse, and far from seeking society, he usually avoids it. 'Even in regard to his colleagues, he always keeps to himself.'¹ Religion, by contrast, is inseparable from the idea of church. In this fundamental respect there is already a crucial difference between magic and religion. Moreover—and this is central—such magic societies never include the believers in magic but only the magicians; the laity, so to speak, those for whose benefit the rites are celebrated and who clearly represent the faithful of regular cults, are excluded. Now, the magician is to magic what the priest is to religion, and a college of priests is not a church, any more than a religious congregation that practises the private cult of a saint in the shadow of the cloister. A church is not simply a priestly brotherhood; it is the moral community formed by all believers in the same faith, worshippers as well as priests. There is no community of this sort when it comes to magic.^{2*}

But if we include the notion of the church in the definition of religion, doesn't this automatically exclude individual religions established by the individual and celebrated for himself alone? Now, there is scarcely any society that does not have such cults. Every Ojibway, as we shall see below, has his personal *manitou* whom he has chosen for himself and for whom he performs particular religious duties; the Melanesian from the Banks islands has his *tamaniu*; the Roman has his *genius*; the Christian has his patron saint and his guardian angel, and so on. All these cults seem, by definition, independent of any idea of the group. And not only are these individual religions very common historically, some people today wonder if they are not likely to become the dominant form of religious life, and if some day the last remaining cult will be the one that each person freely practises for himself within his own conscience.³

¹ Hubert and Mauss, 'Esquisse', 18.

² William Robertson Smith had already shown that magic is opposed to religion, just as the individual is opposed to the social (*Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (2nd edn., London: A. & C. Black, 1894), 264–5). Moreover, in making this distinction between magic and religion, we do not mean to imply that they are entirely discontinuous. The borders between the two are often blurred.

³ This is Spencer's conclusion in his *Ecclesiastical Institutions* (part IV, ch. 16 of *The Principles of Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton, 1886)), and that of Auguste Sabatier in his *Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion d'après la psychologie et l'histoire* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1897) and of the entire school to which he belongs.

But let us leave aside these speculations on the future for the moment and confine ourselves to religions as they are in the present and as they have been in the past. Evidence suggests that these individual cults constitute, not distinct and autonomous religious systems, but simply aspects of the religion common to the church to which the individuals belong. The Christian's patron saint is chosen from an official list of saints recognized by the Catholic Church, and there are canonical rules that prescribe how each worshipper must conduct this private cult. Similarly, the idea that every man necessarily has a protective 'genius' is, in different forms, the basis of a great number of American religions, as well as of the Roman religion (to cite only two examples). As we shall see below, this idea is closely allied to the idea of the soul, and this idea is not one of those things that can be left entirely to individual whim. In sum, it is the church that teaches the individual the identity of his personal gods, what their role is, how he must enter into relationship with them, and how he must honour them. When we systematically analyse the doctrines of such a church, we inevitably come across doctrines concerned with these specialized cults. These are not two different types of religion heading in opposite directions, but rather the same ideas and the same principles applied, in one instance, to circumstances that concern the collectivity as a whole, and in the other, to the life of the individual. They are so closely allied that among certain peoples, the ceremonies in which the worshipper enters for the first time into communication with his protective spirit are combined with rites of an undeniably public character, that is, with initiation rites.¹

There still remain contemporary aspirations towards a religion that would consist entirely of internal and subjective states and would be freely constructed by each of us. But as real as they are, these aspirations cannot affect our definition; this definition can be applied only to established and accomplished facts, not to vague potentials. Religions can be defined as they are now or as they have

¹ This statement of fact does not settle the question of whether external and public religion is merely the development of an internal, personal religion that would be the primitive phenomenon, or whether, on the contrary, private religion would be the extension of public religion within individual consciousness. The problem will be addressed directly below (Book II, Ch. 5, s. II. Cf. same book, Chs. 6 and 7, s. 1). For now we simply note that the individual cult presents itself to the observer as an element and subordinate aspect of the collective cult.

been, not as they are rather vaguely tending to become. It is possible that this religious individualism may one day become fact; but to judge to what extent this is likely, we must first know what religion is, what elements it is made of, what caused it, and what function it performs—all questions that cannot be settled before we have taken up our research. Only at the end of this study shall we be able to anticipate the future.

We have arrived, then, 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 surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church.* The second element that takes its place in our definition is therefore no less essential than the first: demonstrating that the idea of religion is inseparable from the idea of a church suggests that religion must be something eminently collective.¹

¹ In this way our present definition dovetails with the definition proposed earlier in *L'Année sociologique*. In that work religious beliefs were exclusively defined by their obligatory character; but this obligation clearly comes, as we demonstrated, from the fact that these beliefs belong to a group that imposes them on its members. The two definitions, then, partially overlap. We thought a new one should be proposed because the first was too formal and neglected the content of religious representations. In the discussions that follow, we shall see the importance of promptly revealing what is characteristic in this content. Furthermore, if this imperative character is a distinctive feature of religious beliefs, it lies on an infinite spectrum, and in some cases it is not easily perceived. So we spare ourselves many difficulties and confusions by replacing this criterion with the one we use here.

CHAPTER 2

THE LEADING CONCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY RELIGION

I. ANIMISM

SUPPLIED with this definition, we can begin our search for the elementary religion we intend to find.

Even the crudest religions made familiar to us by history and ethnography have a complexity that belies the common notion of the primitive mentality. They display not only an elaborate system of beliefs and rites but such a variety of different principles and a wealth of basic ideas that they seem to be the recent products of a rather long development. So scholars have concluded that to discover the truly original form of religious life, they needed to penetrate beneath these observable religions, analyse the basic elements they share, and see whether there is one from which the others derive.

Put this way, the problem has suggested two contrary solutions.

No religious system exists in any form, past or present, that does not involve two religions bound together and interpenetrating but none the less quite distinct. One addresses natural things, whether great cosmic forces like winds, rivers, stars, the sky, and so on, or objects of all sorts that populate the earth's surface—plants, animals, rocks, etc. For this reason it is called *naturism*. The other addresses spiritual beings—spirits, souls, genies, demons, divinities proper. These are animated and conscious agents, like man, yet distinguished from him by their supposed powers, and in particular by their strange unavailability to sensory perception. This religion of spirits is called *animism*. Now, two incompatible theories have been offered to explain the virtually universal coexistence of these two cults. The first holds that animism is the primitive religion and naturism merely a secondary and derivative form. The other theory regards the cult of nature as the starting point of religious evolution, and the cult of the spirits only a special case.

Until now, these two theories have been the only attempts to

explain rationally' the origins of religious thought. And the central problem posed by the science of religions most often comes down to choosing between these two solutions, or deciding whether it might not be better to combine them, and, if so, what place to grant the two elements. Once we have understood the inadequacy of these traditional ideas, it will be clear that a new approach must be found.

I

It was Tylor who developed the essential features of animist theory.² Spencer then took it up, though not without several modifications.³ Generally speaking, however, they pose questions in the same terms, and their solutions, save one, are identical. We can therefore combine these two doctrines in the following account, taking care to make it clear where they diverge.

Three conditions must be met for animistic beliefs and practices to be seen as the primitive form of religious life: (1) since according to this hypothesis the idea of the soul is the cardinal notion of religion, one must demonstrate how it was formed without borrowing any elements from an earlier religion; (2) it must be shown how souls became the object of a cult and were transformed into spirits; (3) finally, since the cult of spirits is not all there is to any religion, how the cult of nature was derived from that cult must be explained.

According to the animists, the idea of the soul must have been suggested to man by the poorly understood spectacle of the double life he normally leads in the waking state and during sleep. It is claimed that for the savage,⁴ the mental representations he has,

¹ We are leaving aside here theories that wholly or in part involve the intervention of data beyond the scope of experience. We find such a theory, for instance, in Andrew Lang's book *The Making of Religion* and, with some specific variations, in a series of articles on 'L'Origine de l'idée de Dieu' (*Anthropos*, 1908, 1909). Lang does not completely reject animism or naturism, but in the last analysis, he embraces a sense, a direct intuition of the divine. Furthermore, while we do not think it necessary to review and discuss this conception in the present chapter, we do not mean to ignore it entirely; we shall take it up later, when we ourselves must explain the facts on which it depends (Book II, Ch. 9, s. 1V).

² Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, chs. 11-18.

³ See Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, parts I, VI.

⁴ This is the word Tylor uses. Unfortunately, it seems to imply that men, in the proper sense of the term, existed before there was civilization. However, there is no appropriate term: the word 'primitive', which we prefer to use for lack of anything better, is, as we have said, far from satisfactory.

whether awake or asleep, are equally significant. He objectifies both, dream images and waking images alike, seeing them as images of the external objects they more or less accurately reproduce. So when he dreams he has visited a distant land, he believes he really has been there. But he can have been there only if he has two beings within him: one, his body which he left lying on the ground and finds in the same position when he wakes; and another, which has travelled through space. Similarly, if during sleep he sees himself talking to a friend he knows is far away, he concludes that this man, too, is composed of two beings: the one sleeping somewhere else, and the other who has made an appearance in the dream. From these repeated experiences the idea gradually develops that in each of us there is a double, another self, which under certain conditions has the power to leave the body it lives in and to go wandering.

Naturally, this double reproduces all the essential features of the tangible being that serves as its external envelope; at the same time it is distinct in several ways. It is more mobile, since it can cover vast distances in an instant. It is more malleable, more plastic, for to leave the body it must pass through the body's openings, in particular the nose and mouth. So it is imagined as made of matter in some way, but a finer, more ethereal matter than any that we know empirically. This double is the soul. And it is certainly true that in many societies the soul has been conceived as an image of the body. The soul is even thought to replicate the body's accidental deformities caused, for instance, by wounds or mutilations. Certain Australians cut off the enemy's right thumb after killing him so that his soul, deprived of its thumb, cannot throw the javelin and take revenge. But at the same time, though it resembles the body, the soul already has something semi-spiritual about it.

Moreover, other facts of experience that led to the same line of thought were naturally clustered around the basic fact of the dream: fainting fits, apoplexy, catalepsy, ecstasy—all cases involving a temporary loss of consciousness. They are explained very well by the hypothesis that the principle of life and sensation can momentarily leave the body. Moreover, it was natural that this principle should overlap with the double, since each day the absence of the double during sleep suspends life and thought. Thus various observations seemed mutually to test and confirm the idea of the inherent duality of man.

But the soul is not a spirit. It is attached to a body which it leaves only at rare moments; and as long as it is nothing more, it is not the object of a cult. By contrast, although the spirit generally resides in a particular thing, it can distance itself at will, and man can enter into relations with it only by taking ritual precautions. The soul could become a spirit, then, only by transforming itself: this metamorphosis was brought about in the most natural way by the simple application of these ideas to the fact of death. To a rudimentary mind, death is not very distinct from a long fainting spell or a prolonged sleep; it shares all the same features. So it seems that death, too, consists of a separation of body and soul analogous to the separation produced each night. Since in this case, however, the body does not revive, man invents the idea of a separation that is not confined to a specific period. Similarly, once the body is destroyed—and funeral rites function in part to hasten this destruction—the separation is necessarily considered final. Now we have spirits detached from any body and free to travel through space. With their number growing over time, a population of souls is thus formed around the living. These souls of men have the needs and passions of men, and so they seek to meddle in the lives of their former companions, whether to help or to harm, depending on the feelings they still have. Now, their nature makes them, depending on the case, either valued allies or dreaded adversaries. Thanks to their extreme fluidity, they can penetrate bodies and cause all kinds of disorders or, on the contrary, restore waning vitality. So people get into the habit of holding them responsible for all the events of life that seem unusual—there is scarcely anything for which they cannot be held accountable. They constitute an arsenal of available causes, never leaving the mind in a quandary when it searches for explanations. Does a man seem inspired, does he speak eloquently, does he seem elevated above himself and the average level of mankind? A benevolent soul is in him, animating him. Is another man struck down by an attack, gripped by madness? An evil spirit has slipped into his body, troubling him.

Here is the soul transformed. From a simple vital principle animating a human body it has become a spirit, a genie, good or bad, even a divinity, depending on the importance of the effects ascribed to it. But since death is thought to work this apotheosis, it is finally to the dead, to the souls of ancestors, that humanity's first cult may

have been addressed. Thus the first rites were funeral rites, the first sacrifices food offerings meant to satisfy the needs of the departed; and the first altars were graves.

But because these spirits were of human origin, they were interested only in the life of men, and were thought to act only on human events. One still needed to explain how other spirits were imagined in order to account for other phenomena of the universe, and how a cult of nature arose alongside the ancestor cult.

For Tylor, this extension of animism was due to the particular mentality of the primitive who, like the child, does not know how to tell the animate from the inanimate. Because the first beings the child conceptualizes are humans—himself and his family—he tends to represent all things on the model of human nature. He sees living beings like himself in the toys he plays with and in objects of all sorts that affect his senses. Now, the primitive thinks like a child. So he, too, is inclined to endow things, even inanimate things, with a nature like his own. For the reasons discussed, he has arrived at the idea that man is a body animated by a spirit, so he must of necessity lend inorganic objects a similar duality and souls analogous to his own. The spheres of influence of the animate and the inanimate, however, could not be the same. The souls of men have a direct influence only on the world of men: they have a sort of predilection for the human body once death has set them free. By contrast, the souls of things reside mostly in things and are regarded as the cause of all that happens to them. The souls of men are responsible for health or illness, skill or clumsiness, and so forth; the souls of things are used to explain phenomena of the physical world: the course of rivers or the stars, the growth of plants, the reproduction of animals, and so on. This is how man's first philosophy, on which the ancestor cult was based, was completed by a philosophy of the world.

And man found himself in an even more obvious state of dependency with regard to those cosmic spirits than he did in relation to the wandering souls of his ancestors. With the ancestors he could have only a mental and imaginary interchange, while in the real world he depended on things. He needed their cooperation to live, and so he believed that he also needed the spirits thought to animate things and to influence their various manifestations. He implored their help through offerings and prayers. So the religion of man was made complete by a religion of nature. [. . .]

II

We turn now to the theory of Tylor, who still has great authority. His hypotheses of the dream and how the ideas of souls and spirits originate are still classics, so it is important to test their worth.

First, it must be acknowledged that the theorists of animism have made an important contribution to the science of religions and to the general history of ideas by submitting the notion of the soul to historical analysis. Instead of making it a simple and immediate given of consciousness, as so many philosophers do, they saw it, far more accurately, as a complex whole, a product of history and mythology.

But even if we give Tylor credit for posing the problem, his solution none the less raises serious difficulties.

First, we must have reservations about the very principle on which this theory is based. This principle holds that the soul is entirely distinct from the body, that it is the body's double, and whether inside or outside the body, it normally lives its own autonomous life. Now, we may accept this conception as self-evident, but we shall see that it is alien to the primitive, or at least that it expresses only one aspect of his idea of the soul. To him, although the soul is in certain respects independent of the body it animates, it is none the less partially merged with that body, so that it cannot be radically separated from it. Certain organs are not only the acknowledged seat of the soul but also its outward form and material manifestation. The notion is more complex than the doctrine assumes, then, and so it is doubtful that the experiences invoked are sufficient to explain it. Even if those experiences did explain how man imagined he was double, they could not explain how this duality does not exclude, and actually implies, an underlying unity and intimate interpenetration of two beings differentiated in this way.

But let us grant that the idea of the soul may be reduced to the idea of the double and see how the second idea would then take shape. According to Tylor it was suggested to man through the experience of the dream. To understand how he could see distant places during sleep, while his body lay on the ground, he was led to imagine himself as two beings: his body, on the one hand, and on the other a second self capable of leaving the body it lives in and moving through space. But first, for this hypothesis of a double to seem utterly compelling, it must have been the only possible explanation,

or the most economical one. Now, there are actually simpler ideas that must surely have come to mind just as naturally. For example, why wouldn't the sleeper have imagined that he could see things far away as he slept? To ascribe such a power to himself would have taken less imagination than constructing this very complicated notion of a double made of an ethereal, semi-invisible substance unavailable to direct experience. In any case, granting that certain dreams rather naturally call for the animist explanation, there are surely others that are absolutely resistant to it. Our dreams often relate to past events; we see again what we saw or did when we were awake yesterday, the day before, during our youth, and so on. These kinds of dreams are common and have a significant place in our nocturnal life. Now, the idea of the double cannot account for them. Even if the double can travel from one point to another in space, it is hard to see how it could travel back through time. How could a man, however rudimentary his intelligence, believe when he wakes that he has just witnessed or taken part in events that he knows happened in earlier times? How could he imagine that in his sleep he lived a life he knows is long past? It would have been much more natural for him to see these resurrected images for what they really are, namely memories like those he has during the day, just unusually intense ones. [. . .]

Furthermore, even if the hypothesis of the double could adequately explain every dream and no other explanation would do, we would still have to account for why man has tried to explain it at all. No doubt the dream could present a possible problem. But we constantly overlook problems that we choose not to pose for ourselves and do not even suspect until some circumstance makes us feel the need to pose them. Even when the taste for pure speculation is stimulated, reflection does not raise all the questions to which it might apply itself; it is attracted only to those of special interest. Especially when the phenomena in question recur repeatedly in the same way, habit easily dulls curiosity, and we no longer feel inclined to wonder about them. To shake off this torpor, practical considerations or at least a pressing theoretical interest must attract our attention and turn it in the right direction. This is why at any historical moment there are many things we give up trying to understand without even noticing. [. . .] Heredity is a long-established fact, but only recently has anyone tried to devise a theory to explain it. [. . .]

It is therefore difficult to see what led the primitive to make the dream the topic of his meditations. What is the dream's place in our life? Quite a small place, it seems, since it leaves such vague impressions in the memory and so quickly fades. So it is surprising that a man of such rudimentary intelligence might have made such efforts to explain it! Of the two lives he leads, day and night, it is his day-time life that should interest him most. Isn't it strange that his nocturnal life should so capture his attention that he would make it the basis of a whole system of complicated ideas destined to have such a profound influence on his thought and conduct?

There is overwhelming proof, then, that the animist theory of the soul must be re-evaluated, despite the credit it still enjoys. Today the primitive himself probably does attribute his dreams, or some of them, to the wanderings of his double. But this does not mean that the dream has provided the raw material for the idea of the double or the soul; this idea could have been applied to the phenomena of the dream, ecstasy, and possession after the fact, not derived from them. An idea, once formed, is often used to order or illuminate—by a light sometimes more apparent than real—phenomena to which it was originally unconnected and that could not have suggested it themselves. Today the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are proved by showing that these beliefs are implied by the basic principles of morality.* Their real origin is quite different. The history of religious thought could provide numerous examples of these retrospective justifications that teach us nothing about the formation of these ideas or their constituent elements.

It is likely, moreover, that the primitive distinguishes among his dreams and does not explain them all in the same way. [. . .] The Dieri make very clear distinctions between ordinary dreams and nocturnal visions in which some friend or deceased relative appears. They give different names to these two states. The first they see as a simple flight of imagination; the second they attribute to the influence of an evil spirit.¹ [. . .] Such dreams were possible only when people already had the idea of spirits, souls, a land of the dead; that is, only when religious development was relatively advanced. Far from providing religion with its fundamental idea,

¹ Alfred William Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 358.

dreams presupposed and were the result of a religious system already in place.¹

III

But let us come to the heart of the doctrine.

Wherever the idea of the double comes from, this idea is not sufficient, the animists admit, to explain how the ancestor cult was formed, the cult they see as the original of all religions. To become the object of a cult, the double would have had to become more than a simple replica of the individual and to take on features suitable to the elevated rank of sacred beings. Death is said to work this transformation. But where does death get such power? Even if the similarity of sleep and death could have inspired the belief that the soul survives the body (and we have some reservations on this point), why would that soul, already detached from the body, entirely change its nature? If it was merely a profane thing while alive, a walking vital principle, how could it suddenly become a sacred thing, the object of religious feelings? Death adds nothing essential to it, save greater freedom of movement. Being no longer attached to a regular residence, it can now do at any time what it could formerly do only at night; but the kinds of acts it can perform are still the same. So why would the living have seen in this uprooted and vagabond double of a former companion anything but a fellow being? It was a fellow being whose presence might be unwanted, but it was not a divinity.²

¹ Andrew Lang, who also refuses to grant that the idea of the soul was suggested to man by the experience of dreaming, believed it could be derived from other experiential givens: the facts of spiritism (telepathy, distance vision, etc.). There is no need, in our view, to discuss his theory as it is elaborated in his book *The Making of Religion*. It rests on the hypothesis that spiritism is a constant matter of observation, that distance vision is a real faculty of man, or at least of certain men, and we know how seriously this postulate is scientifically suspect. Even more suspect is the contention that the facts of spiritism are obvious enough and common enough to have served as the basis of all religious beliefs and practices relating to souls and spirits. The examination of these questions would take us too far away from the subject of our study. And since Lang's theory is vulnerable to several of the objections we address to Tylor's in the paragraphs that follow, such a separate examination seems unnecessary.

² Jevons makes an analogous observation. Like Tylor, he accepts that the idea of the soul comes from dreaming and that once this idea was conceived, man projected it onto things. But, he adds, the fact that nature may have been conceived as animated in the image of man does not explain why it should become the object of a cult. 'From the fact that man sees in a tree that bends and a flame that comes and goes a living being like

It even seems that death should weaken vital energies rather than recharge them. It is a very widespread belief in lower societies that the soul intimately participates in the life of the body. If the body is injured, the soul is injured too, in a corresponding place. So it ought to age along with the body. In fact, there are peoples who do not perform funeral rites for those who have reached senility; they are treated as if their souls had become senile as well.¹ [. . .] When death results from illness or old age, it seems that the soul could preserve only diminished strength; and if the soul is merely the body's double, it is difficult to see how the soul might survive once the body has disintegrated. From this point of view, the idea of survival becomes scarcely intelligible. There is a discrepancy, a logical and psychological gap, between the idea of a double set free and that of a spirit that becomes the object of a cult.

This gap seems even greater when we know what an abyss separates the world of the sacred from that of the profane. Clearly, a simple change of degree could not be enough to push something from one category to the other. Sacred beings are not distinct from profane beings merely by the odd or disconcerting forms they take or by the more extensive powers they enjoy; they simply share no common measure. Now, nothing in the idea of a double could account for such radical heterogeneity. It is said that once it has left the body, the soul can do the living great good or great harm, depending on how it treats them. But disturbing its neighbours is not enough for a being to seem different in kind from those whose peace it threatens. Of course, the faithful always feel a mixture of fear and reticence toward the things they worship; but this fear is *sui generis*, containing more respect than fright, and chiefly that singular emotion that *majesty* inspires in man. The idea of majesty is essentially religious. With all this, we have explained nothing about religion if we have not discovered where this idea comes from, what it corresponds to, and what could have awakened it in human con-

himself, it does not at all follow that either is considered a supernatural being; on the contrary, to the extent that they resemble him, they can do nothing that in his eyes is supernatural' (*An Introduction to the History of Religion*, 55).

¹ See Sir Baldwin Spencer and Francis James Gillen, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 506; and *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 512.

sciousness. Simple human souls could not have been endowed with this feature just because they are disembodied. [. . .]

Death in itself has no power to confer divinity. Since it consummates the separation of the soul from profane things more completely and finally, death may indeed reinforce the already sacred character of the soul, but it does not create it.

Furthermore if, as the animist hypothesis assumes, the first sacred beings were really the souls of the dead and the first cult the cult of ancestors, it would follow that the lower the society, the more central this cult would be in its religious life. Instead, the opposite is true. The ancestor cult develops and appears in characteristic form only in advanced societies like those of China, Egypt, or the Greek and Latin cities. By contrast, it is absent in the Australian societies, which represent, as we shall see, the lowest and simplest form of social organization we know. Of course funeral and mourning rites are found in these societies; but although such practices have sometimes been given the name, they are not cults after all. A cult is not simply a set of ritual precautions that man is bound to perform in certain circumstances; it is a system of rites, feasts, and various ceremonies that *all share the feature of periodic recurrence*. They satisfy the believer's need regularly to tighten and strengthen the bond between him and the sacred beings on which he depends. This is why one speaks of nuptial rites and not a nuptial cult, of birth rites and not a cult of the newborn; for the events that occasion these rites imply no periodicity. Similarly, there is an ancestor cult only when sacrifices are made on graves from time to time, when libations are poured on them at more or less fixed moments, or when feasts are regularly celebrated in honour of the dead. But the Australian does not engage in any dealings of this kind with his dead.

There are, however, Australian tribes that periodically celebrate rites in honour of fabled ancestors whom tradition places at the origin of time. These ceremonies generally consist of various dramatic presentations miming the deeds attributed in myth to these legendary heroes.¹ Yet the characters dramatized in this way are not men who, after living a human life, were transformed by death into something like gods. They are thought to have enjoyed superhuman powers during their lifetimes. Everything of great importance in the

¹ See in particular Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, chs. 6, 7, 9.

history of the tribe, and even the history of the world, is attributed to them. [. . .] So there is no suggestion that death has the slightest power to confer divinity. [. . .]

Thus, the cult that should have been dominant in lower societies, according to this hypothesis, is non-existent. In short, the Australian is occupied with his dead only at the moment of decease and the period immediately following. And yet, as we shall see, with regard to sacred beings of a completely different nature, these same peoples practise a complex cult involving a variety of ceremonies that sometimes last weeks and even whole months. Surely the few rites the Australian performs when he happens to lose one of his relatives could not possibly be the source of these permanent cults, which recur regularly each year and take up a significant part of his life. The contrast between these rites is so great that we may well wonder whether the first have not derived from the second—whether the souls of men, far from being the model for imagining the gods, were not originally conceived as emanations of the divinity.

IV

If the cult of the dead is not primary, animism loses its underpinnings. It may therefore seem pointless to discuss the third thesis of the system, which concerns the transformation of the cult of the dead into a cult of nature. None the less, this notion must be carefully examined since its premiss is found even among historians of religion who do not accept animism *per se*, historians like Brinton,¹ Lang,² Reville,³ even Robertson Smith⁴ himself.

This extension of the cult of the dead to include the whole of nature is said to come about because we instinctively tend to represent all things in our own image, as living and thinking beings. We have seen that Spencer already contested the reality of this so-called instinct. Since an animal clearly distinguishes living bodies from inanimate objects, it was unthinkable to him that man, as descendant of the animal, should not have the same capacity for discernment

¹ Daniel Garrison Brinton, *The Religions of Primitive Peoples* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1897), 47 ff.

² Andrew Lang, *Mythes, cultes et religions* (Paris: Alcan, 1896), 50.

³ Albert Reville, *Les Religions des peuples non civilisés*, vol. ii (Paris: Fischbacher, 1883), conclusion.

⁴ Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 126, 132.

from the outset. But while the facts Spencer cites are valid, their demonstrative value in the present case is not self-evident. His argument assumes that all animal faculties, instincts, and aptitudes are passed down to man intact. But many errors arise from this principle, which is wrongly regarded as an obvious truth . . . The fact is that man is not simply an animal with a few additional qualities: he is something altogether different.

Human nature is the result of recasting animal nature, so to speak, and in the course of the complex operations involved in this recasting, there are losses as well as gains. What instincts we have lost! And why? Because man is not only related to a physical setting but also to an infinitely more extensive, more stable, and more influential social setting than animals. In order to live, then, he must adapt to that setting. Now, to maintain itself society often needs us to view things from a certain perspective and feel things in a certain way. Consequently, it modifies the ideas and feelings we would be inclined to have if we strictly obeyed our animal natures—even replacing them with their opposites. Doesn't society manage to make us view our own life as something of little value, while for the animal it is the supreme good?¹ It is futile, then, to try to infer primitive man's mental make-up from that of the higher animals.

But while Spencer's objection does not have the decisive impact its author assumes, neither does the animist hypothesis derive any authority from the apparent confusions of children. When we hear a child reproach an object that has hurt him, we conclude that he sees it as a conscious being like himself; but this is a misinterpretation of his words and gestures. In reality, he is ignorant of the very complicated reasoning attributed to him. He attacks the table that has hurt him, not because he assumes it is animate and intelligent, but only because it has hurt him. Anger, once roused by pain, needs to be externalized and discharged on something; naturally this anger discharges on the thing that provoked it, although that thing can do nothing about it. Adult behaviour in a similar case is often just as unreasonable. When we are intensely irritated, we feel the need to spew invective and destroy, without imputing any conscious will to the objects on which we vent our anger. There is so little confusion that when the child's emotion has calmed, he knows very well how to

¹ See *Le Suicide*, 233 ff.

distinguish a chair from a person: he does not treat them both the same way. [. . .]

Let us, then, put aside these dubious analogies. To know whether man was originally inclined to the confusions imputed to him, neither the animal nor the child of today should be the focus of our consideration, but rather primitive beliefs themselves. If the spirits and gods of nature are really made in the image of the human soul, they must bear the mark of their origin and the essential features of their model. The soul's most salient feature is to be conceived as the internal principle that animates the body; it is the soul that moves the body, that makes it live, and when the soul withdraws, life ends or is suspended. The soul has its natural residence in the body, at least while the body exists. This is not the case with official spirits assigned to different natural phenomena. The sun god is not necessarily in the sun, nor does the spirit of a stone reside in the stone that serves as its usual habitat. A spirit undoubtedly maintains close ties with the body to which it is attached, but to call that spirit its soul is quite inaccurate . . . While the soul is essentially the inner core of the body, the spirit spends the greater part of its existence outside the object that serves it as base. This difference seems to contradict the notion that the idea of spirits came from the idea of souls.

On the other hand, if man had truly felt the need to project his image onto things, the first sacred beings would have been made to resemble him. Now, far from being primitive, anthropomorphism is rather the mark of a relatively advanced civilization. In the beginning, sacred beings are conceived in the form of animals or plants from which the human form only slowly emerges. We shall see below that, in Australia, animals and plants are on the highest level of sacred things. [. . .] To find a god made entirely of human elements, one must come almost to Christianity. Here, God is a man, not only in the physical aspect in which he temporarily manifested himself, but also in the ideas and feelings he expresses. But even though the gods of Greece and Rome are generally represented with human features, several mythic characters still bear the trace of an animal origin: Dionysus is often encountered in the form of a bull, or at least with the horns of a bull; Demeter is represented with a horse's mane; there are Pan, Silenus, the fauns, etc.¹ Therefore, man does not seem

¹ See W. de Visser, *De Graecorum diis non referentibus speciem humanam*. Cf. P. Perdrizet, *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* (1889), 635.

to have been at all inclined at this point to impose his form on things. Moreover, he began by conceiving of himself as an intimate participant in animal nature. Indeed, it is a nearly universal belief in Australia, and still very widespread among the Indians of North America, that the ancestors of men were plants or animals, or at least that the first men had, wholly or in part, the distinctive characteristics of certain animal or plant species. Thus, far from seeing everywhere only beings like himself, man began thinking of himself in the image of beings from which he specifically differed.

V

Animist theory implies, moreover, a consequence that may be its best refutation.

If this theory were true, we would have to acknowledge that religious beliefs are nothing more than hallucinated representations with no objective foundation. The assumption is that these beliefs are all derived from the notion of the soul, since spirits and gods are considered merely purified souls. But the notion of the soul itself, according to Tylor and his disciples, is flooded with vague and inconsistent images that occupy our minds during sleep, for the soul is the double, and the double is only man as he appears to himself during sleep. From this point of view, then, sacred beings would be nothing but imaginary notions that man created in a kind of delirium that seizes him regularly each day, and it is impossible to see what useful ends they serve or to what they correspond in reality. If he prays, makes sacrifices and offerings, observes the various privations prescribed by ritual, this is because some sort of congenital aberration has made him take his dreams for perceptions, death for a prolonged sleep, inanimate objects for living and sentient beings. [. . .] In the end, religion is only a systematized but waking dream without any basis in the real world.¹ This is why when the theorists of

¹ According to Spencer, however, there is a grain of truth in the belief in spirits: the idea 'that the power that is manifest in consciousness is another form of the power that is manifest outside consciousness' ('Ecclesiastical Institutions', part VI, s. 659 in *The Principles of Sociology*, iii. 169). Spencer means that the notion of force in general is the feeling of the force of our own force extended to the whole universe. Animism implicitly accepts this when it populates nature with spirits analogous to our own. But even if this hypothesis were true—and it prompts serious reservations which we will discuss below (Book III, ch. 3, s. III)—it is not in itself religious; it invokes no cult. The fact remains

animism seek the origins of religious thought, they are satisfied with so little effort. When they think they have managed to explain how man could be induced to imagine beings in strange, vaporous forms like those we see in dreams, they think the problem is resolved.

In reality, it has not even been broached. It makes no sense that systems of ideas like religion, which have held such a major place in history and from which people have always drawn the energy needed to live, are merely tissues of illusion. Today we understand that law, morality, and scientific thought itself are born from religion, have long been confused with it, and remain imbued with its spirit. How could a futile phantasmagoria have so powerfully and permanently fashioned human consciousness? Surely the science of religions ought to operate on the principle that religion expresses nothing that is not in nature, for science deals only with natural phenomena.* The question is, in what realm of nature do these realities belong, and what has compelled men to conceive of them in that singular form peculiar to religious thought? But to pose this question at all we must begin by granting that the things conceived of in this way are real. When the philosophers of the eighteenth century treated religion as a great error invented by priests, they could at least explain its persistence by the interest of the priestly caste in deceiving the masses. But if the people themselves created these systems of mistaken ideas even as they were their dupes, how could this deception be perpetuated throughout the course of history?

that the system of religious symbols and rites, the classification of things into sacred and profane—everything that is strictly speaking religious in religion—corresponds to nothing in the real world. Moreover, this grain of truth is also, and even more, a grain of error. For if it is true that the forces of nature and those of consciousness are related, they are also profoundly distinct, and to treat them as the same is to run the danger of profound miscalculations.

CHAPTER 3

THE LEADING CONCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY RELIGION (Continued)

II. NATURISM

THE naturist school is inspired by a very different mentality.

It finds recruits, moreover, in different circles. The animists are, for the most part, ethnographers or anthropologists. The religions they have studied figure among the crudest ever practised by humanity. Hence the primary importance they attribute to the souls of the dead, to spirits and demons, in other words, to spiritual beings of the second order. A higher order of things is unfamiliar to these religions. By contrast, the theories we will now discuss are the work of scholars who are chiefly concerned with the great civilizations of Europe and Asia.

As soon as scholars could see the advantage, following the brothers Grimm, of comparing the different mythologies of the Indo-European peoples, they were struck by remarkable similarities. Mythic characters were identified that, under different names, symbolized the same ideas and fulfilled the same functions. The very names bore some resemblance, and scholars thought they could often establish a certain relationship. Such similarities could be explained only by a common origin. Scholars were therefore led to infer that these conceptions, so varied in appearance, issued from a common source that might be discovered. By using the comparative method, they thought they could trace back beyond these great religions to a much more ancient system of ideas, a truly primitive religion from which the others derived.

The greatest stimulus to these ambitions was the discovery of the Vedas, a written text whose antiquity may have been exaggerated at the time it was discovered, but which is none the less one of the oldest texts available to us in an Indo-European language. So by using the ordinary methods of philology,* they were able to study a literature as old as or older than Homer, and a religion thought to be more primitive than that of the ancient Germans. Clearly, a document of such value would shed a new light on the religious

beginnings of humanity, and the science of religions could only be renewed by it. [. . .]

I

We have seen that the underlying assumption of animism is that religion, at least originally, expresses no experiential reality. Max Müller starts from the opposite principle.¹ For him, it is axiomatic that religion rests on an experience from which it draws all its authority. 'To hold its proper place as a legitimate element of our consciousness,' he says, 'religion must begin, like all the areas of our knowledge, with a tangible experience.' Taking as his guide the old empirical adage *Nihil est in intellectu quod non ante fuerit in sensu*,* he applies it to religion and declares that there can be nothing in faith that was not first felt by the senses. Here we have a doctrine that seems to escape our serious objection to animism. From this viewpoint religion appears not as a vague and confused reverie but rather as a system of ideas and practices well grounded in reality.

But what are the sensations that generate religious thought? This is the question that the study of the Vedas should have helped to resolve.

In it, the names of the gods are generally common nouns still used as such, or former common nouns whose original meaning can be recovered. Both designate major natural phenomena. Thus *Agni*, the name of one of the leading divinities of India, first meant only the material fact of fire as perceived by the senses without any mythological addition. It is still used in the Vedas in this way. In any case the fact that it was preserved in other Indo-European languages indicates that this meaning was primary: the Latin *ignis*, the Lithuanian *ugnis*, the Old Slavonic *ogny* are clearly close relatives of *Agni*.

¹ In addition to *Comparative Mythology*, the works of Max Müller in which his general theories on religion are discussed are: the *Hibbert Lectures (Lectures on the Origins and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religions of India)* (London: Longmans, 1878); *Natural Religion* (London: Longmans, 1889); *Physical Religion* (London: Longmans, 1898); *Anthropological Religion* (London: Longmans, 1892); *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (London: Longmans, 1895); *Contributions to the Science of Mythology* (London: Longmans, 1897). Because of the connections between Max Müller's mythological theories and his linguistic philosophy, the preceding works must be compared with those of his books devoted to language or logic, notably *Lectures on the Science of Language* (London: Longmans, 1861-4) and *The Science of Thought* (London: Longmans, 1878).

Similarly, the kinship of the Sanskrit *Dyaus*, of the Greek *Zeus*, of the Latin *Jovis*, of the High German *Zio* is considered incontestable today. These linguistic connections demonstrate that these words designate the same divine being recognized by the various Indo-European peoples before their separation. Now, *Dyaus* means 'the bright sky'. These facts and others like them seem to prove that for these peoples, the body and the forces of nature were the first source of religious feeling, the first things to be deified. Taking a further step toward generalization, Max Müller thought he was justified in concluding that the religious development of humanity in general had the same starting point.

He justifies this inference almost exclusively by psychological considerations. For him, the varied spectacles that nature offers man seem to fulfil all the conditions necessary for awakening the mind to the religious idea. 'At the first glance men cast upon the world', he says,

nothing seemed less natural to them than nature. Nature was for them the great surprise and the great fear; it was a permanent marvel and a permanent miracle. It was only later, when men discovered their constancy, their invariance, and their regular recurrence, that certain aspects of that miracle were called natural, in the sense that they were foreseen, ordinary, and intelligible . . . It is this vast domain open to feelings of surprise and fear, this marvel, this miracle, this immense unknown opposed to what is known . . . that provided the first impulse to religious thought and religious language.¹

And to illustrate his thought, he applies it to a natural force that holds a central place in Vedic religion: fire. 'Try', he says,

to transport yourself through thought to that stage in primitive life where, of necessity, one must place the origin and even the first phases of the religion of nature; you will find it easy to imagine what impression the first appearance of fire must have made on the human mind.

No matter how it first appeared—whether it came from lightning, whether it was obtained by rubbing tree branches against one another, or whether it sprang forth as sparks from rocks—it was something that made life possible in winter, gave protection at night, and served as both an offensive and a defensive weapon. Thanks to fire, man ceased to be a devourer of raw meat and became an eater of cooked foods. Later, it was

¹ Müller, *Physical Religion*, 119–20.

also by means of fire that metals were worked, and tools and weapons made; it thus became an indispensable factor in all technical and artistic progress. What would we be, even now, without fire?¹

Man, says the same author in another work, cannot enter into relations with nature without some sense of its immensity, its infinity. It outflanks him in every direction. Beyond the spaces he sees, there are others that extend limitlessly; each moment of duration is preceded and followed by a time without end; the flowing river manifests an infinite force, since nothing exhausts it. No aspect of nature can fail to awaken in us that overwhelming sensation of an infinite that surrounds and dominates us. For Müller, it is from this sensation that religions derive.

Yet they are inherent in this sensation only in embryo. Religion is truly formed only when these natural forces have ceased to be imagined abstractly. They must be transformed into personal agents, into living and thinking beings, into spiritual powers, into gods; for the cult is generally addressed to beings of this kind. We have seen that animism, too, is forced to pose this question, and we have heard its answer: man had a kind of native inability to distinguish the animate from the inanimate, and an irresistible urge to conceive the inanimate in animate form. Max Müller rejects this solution. According to him, it is language that has worked this metamorphosis through its influence on thought.

This metamorphosis can be easily explained. Mystified by these marvellous forms to which they felt subject, men were prompted to reflection; they wondered what these forms were made of and endeavoured to replace the vague sensation they originally had with a clearer idea, a better-defined concept. But, as our author quite aptly says,² ideas and concepts are impossible without words. Language is not only an external envelope of thought, it is thought's internal structure. Language does not just translate thought once it is formed; it creates it. However, language has its own nature and is governed by laws that are not the laws of thought. So since language helps to shape thought, it cannot avoid doing it some violence and distorting it. A distortion of this kind would account for the peculiar nature of religious representations.

To think is really to order our ideas, to classify them. To think of

¹ *Physical Religion*, 121; cf. 304.

² See Müller, *The Science of Thought*, 30.

fire, for example, is to rank it in this or that category of things, so we can say it is this or that, this and not that. But on the other hand, to classify is to name, for a general idea has no existence or reality except in and through the word that expresses it, and this is what makes it unique. So the language of a people always has an influence on the way the mind, and therefore thought, classifies the new things it learns; for these are adapted to pre-existing frameworks. This is why the language men spoke when they thought to devise an encompassing representation of the universe left an indelible mark on the system of ideas they created.

We still have a remnant of that language—at least among Indo-European peoples. Despite their distance from that archaic language, our current languages retain traces—roots—that allow us to infer what it once was. These root-words, from which the other words we use are derived and which are found at the basis of all Indo-European idioms, are regarded by Max Müller as echoes of the language spoken by the various peoples before their separation, when this religion of nature was formed. Now, these roots present two remarkable features which, though observed only in this particular group of languages, our author believes to be equally verifiable in other linguistic families.

First of all, these roots are representative; they do not express particular things or individuals but types, even types of extreme generality. They represent the most general themes of thought. Those basic mental categories that govern all mental life at any historical moment—which philosophers have time and time again tried to reconstruct—are found in them fixed and crystallized.

Second, the types to which they correspond are types of action, not objects. They translate the most general ways of acting to be observed among living things, and especially among human beings: acts of striking, pushing, rubbing, binding, lifting, squeezing, climbing, descending, walking, and so on. In other words, man generalized and named his major modes of action before generalizing and naming the phenomena of nature.

Thanks to their extreme generality, these root-words could easily be extended to all sorts of objects they did not originally cover. And this extreme flexibility has enabled them to generate the different words that derive from them. So when man, turning toward things, began to name them in order to think about them, he applied these

sounds to things even though they were not originally meant for things. Because of their origin, however, they could designate the different forces of nature only by those manifestations that most resembled human actions: lightning was called *something* that hollows the ground as it falls or spreads fire, wind *something* that moans or blows, sun *something* that shoots golden arrows through space, the river *something* that runs, and so on. But because natural phenomena were assimilated to human actions in this way, that something to which they were related was necessarily imagined in the form of personal agents more or less like man. This was only a metaphor, but one that was taken literally; the mistake was inevitable because science, which alone could dissipate illusion, did not yet exist. In short, because language was made up of human elements that translated human states, it could not be applied to nature without transfiguring it. [. . .] On the material world as it is revealed to our senses, language therefore superimposed a new world populated exclusively by spiritual beings, created out of whole cloth, who were then considered the determining causes of physical phenomena.

The influence of language did not stop there. Once words had been forged to designate these personalities which popular imagination had placed behind things, thought was applied to those words themselves: the words posed all sorts of puzzles, and myths were invented to solve them. Sometimes, the same object received a number of names corresponding to the various ways it was experienced. For example, there are more than twenty words in the Vedas to designate the sky. People believed that because these words were different, they corresponded to distinct personalities. But at the same time, these personalities necessarily seemed to be related. To account for this, people imagined they formed a single family: a genealogy, births, deaths, marriages, and a general history were invented for them. In other cases, different things were designated by the same term: to explain these homonyms, the corresponding things were conceived as transformations of each other, and new fictions were invented to make these metamorphoses intelligible. Or a word that was no longer understood was the source of fables meant to invest it with meaning. So the creative work of language was pursued with increasingly complex constructions; as mythology managed to endow each god with an increasingly extended and

complete biography, divine personalities, at first confused with things, became distinct and self-creating.

According to naturist theory, this is how the notion of the divine was formed. Ancestor worship was merely a reflection of this process. The notion of the soul was formed for reasons rather similar to Tylor's, only according to Max Müller it would have been created to account for death, not the dream. Then, under the influence of different circumstances, partly accidental, the souls of men, once separated from the body, were gradually drawn into the circle of divine beings and finally became divinities themselves. But this new cult was merely the product of a secondary formation. The proof is that deified men have most often been imperfect gods or demi-gods, and all peoples have always known how to tell them from divinities proper.

II

This doctrine rests in part on certain linguistic postulates that have been, and still are, very much in dispute. Many of those concordances Max Müller thought he observed between names that designate the gods in different European languages have been questioned. Doubt has been cast especially on his interpretation of these concordances; scholars have wondered whether, far from being the sign of a very primitive religion, they were not the belated product of either direct borrowings or natural encounters. Today, moreover, we no longer accept the idea that such linguistic roots might have existed in an isolated state as autonomous realities, or that they allow us, as a result, to reconstruct, even hypothetically, the primitive language of Indo-European peoples. Finally, recent research tends to demonstrate that not all Vedic divinities have the exclusively naturist character that Max Müller and his school attributed to them. But we shall set aside these questions, which would require a special competence in linguistics to examine carefully, and review the general principles of the system. Besides, the naturist idea should not be confused with these controversial postulates; for it is accepted by a number of scholars who do not give language the dominant role Max Müller assigned to it.

Everyone readily grants that man has an interest in knowing the world around him, and that consequently his thoughts were quickly

applied to it. The assistance of things with which he had immediate contact was so crucial that he had to try and understand their nature. But if, as naturism claims, religious thought was born from these reflections, it is incomprehensible that it could have survived these first attempts and persisted as it did. We need to know things so as to act in a way that is appropriate to them. Now, the religious representation of the universe was too crudely truncated, especially in the beginning, to have fostered practices useful in daily life. It views things as nothing less than living and thinking beings—consciousnesses and personalities like those the religious imagination has made the agents of cosmic phenomena. It was not by conceiving of them in this form and treating them accordingly that man made them serve his ends. It was not by praying to them, celebrating them with feast days and sacrifices, with self-imposed fasts and privations, that he could stop them from harming him or force them to further his plans. Such procedures could have succeeded only very rarely and, to say the least, miraculously. If religion had had to be justified by giving us a representation of the world that would guide us in our dealings with it, religion could not have performed this function, and people would have been quick to notice. The failures, infinitely more frequent than the successes, would soon have warned them they were on the wrong track, and religion, given the lie at every turn, could not have endured. [. . .]

Only in appearance, then, does naturism escape our objection to animism. Since naturism reduces religion to nothing but a vast metaphor with no objective value, it too turns religion into a system of hallucinatory images.¹ It does, of course, assign religion a starting

¹ This argument does not convince those who see religion as a technique (notably a hygienic technique), whose rules, while sanctioned by imaginary beings, are none the less well founded. But we will not linger to discuss an idea that is so untenable and that has never really been argued in a systematic way by anyone even remotely familiar with the history of religions. It is difficult to see how terrible initiation practices can enhance the health they put at risk; how dietary prohibitions against perfectly healthy animals are hygienic; how sacrifices that took place during the building of a house could make it more solid, etc. No doubt there are religious precepts that do serve some practical purpose; but these are lost amidst the others, and very often this purpose has its price. If there is religious prophylaxis, there is religious filth that derives from the same principles. The rule that the dead must be removed from the camp because they are the seat of a dreaded spirit is pragmatically useful. But the same belief dictates that relatives rub themselves with liquids from the putrefying corpse because these are thought to have exceptional powers. In technical matters, magic is often more useful than religion.

point in the real world, namely in the sensations that natural phenomena induce in us; but it is by the marvellous workings of language that sensation is transformed into extravagant ideas. Religious thought comes into contact with reality only to shroud it again with a thick veil that hides its true forms: this veil is the fabric of fabulous beliefs woven by mythology. The believer, like someone delirious, lives in a world populated by beings and things that have only a verbal existence. Moreover, Max Müller recognizes this, since for him myths are the product of a thought disorder. He had originally attributed them to a disorder of language; but since in his view language and thought are inseparable, what is true of one is true of the other. [. . .] This argument is valid not only against Max Müller and his theory, but against the very principle of naturism, no matter how it is applied. Whatever we do, if expressing the forces of nature is the chief purpose of religion, it is impossible to see religion as anything but a system of misleading fictions whose survival is incomprehensible.

True, Max Müller thought he had escaped this objection, which he took seriously, by making a radical distinction between mythology and religion, and excluding the first from the second. He reserves the label 'religion' solely for beliefs that conform to the prescriptions of moral health and the teachings of a rational theology. Myths, by contrast, are seen as parasitic developments that, under the influence of language, came to be grafted onto those fundamental representations and distorted them. Thus, for Müller, the belief in Zeus was religious to the extent that the Greeks saw Zeus as the supreme God, father of humanity, protector of laws, avenger of crimes, and so on. But everything concerning the biography of Zeus—his marriages, his love affairs—was only mythology.

But this distinction is arbitrary. While mythology is certainly important to aesthetics as well as to the science of religions, it is none the less one of the essential elements of religious life. If myth is subtracted from religion, then rites must be as well; for rites are most commonly addressed to definite personalities that have a name, a character, fixed attributes, and a history, and the rites vary according to the way these personalities are conceived. The cult devoted to the divinity depends on the features attributed to him, and it is myth that determines these features. The rite is often nothing but the myth enacted: Christian communion is inseparable from the paschal

myth that gives it meaning. If all mythology is the product of a kind of verbal delirium, then the issue we posed still stands: the existence and especially the persistence of the cult is inexplicable. It makes no sense that men could have continued over the centuries to make pointless gestures. Moreover, it is not only the particular characteristics of the divine figures that are determined by myths; the very idea that there are gods, spiritual beings responsible for the various sectors of nature, is essentially mythic, no matter how they are represented. If we remove from the religions of the past everything involving the notion of the gods as cosmic agents, what is left? The idea of divinity in itself, of a transcendent power that has created man and to which he is subject? But this is a philosophic and abstract conception that was never embodied as such in any historical religion; it has no importance for the science of religions. Let us refrain, then, from making distinctions among religious beliefs, keeping some because they seem just and sound, rejecting others as unworthy because they offend and disturb us. All myths, even those we find most irrational, have been objects of faith. Man believed in them no less than in his own sensations, and governed his conduct according to them. Despite appearances, then, they must have some objective foundation.

Yet it will be said that no matter how religions are explained, they are certainly mistaken about the true nature of things—this has been proved by science. The modes of action they advised or prescribed to man could only rarely have been effective: illnesses are not cured through purifying rituals, nor do crops grow because of chants and sacrifices. So the objection that we made to naturism seems to apply to all possible systems of explanation.

There is one, however, that escapes intact. Let us suppose that religion answers a very different need from our adaptation to tangible things. It will not be diminished if it fails to satisfy this need, or satisfies it only inadequately. If religious faith was not born to ensure man's harmony with the material world, the errors it made him commit in his struggles with the world would have had little effect because it was nourished from another source. If people became believers for reasons other than this, they must have continued to believe even when these reasons were contradicted by facts. Faith must have been quite strong, then, not only to withstand these contradictions, but to deny them and prevent the believer from taking

them to heart; in effect, such faith made them inoffensive to religion. When religious feeling is intense, it does not accept that religion could be guilty and easily suggests explanations that preserve its innocence: if the rite does not produce the expected results, the failure is imputed either to some fault in execution or to the intervention of a rival divinity. But for this to happen, religious ideas cannot arise from a feeling that is troubled by the disappointments of experience. Otherwise, how could we account for their resilience?

III

Moreover, even if man had reasons to persist, despite every disappointment, in expressing cosmic phenomena in religious symbols, these symbols would still have to be the kind that suggest this interpretation. How would they have acquired this peculiar feature? Here again, we find ourselves in the presence of one of those postulates that seem obvious only because no one has questioned them. It is considered axiomatic that the natural play of physical forces is adequate to awaken in us the idea of the sacred. But when we examine more closely the rather hasty proofs that have been offered for this proposition, we find that it really comes down to a preconception.

We talk about the amazement men must have felt as they discovered the world. But first and foremost, what characterizes the life of nature is a monotonous regularity. Every morning the sun rises on the horizon, every evening it sets, every month the moon completes the same cycle; the river flows unimpeded in its bed; the same seasons periodically bring the same sensations. Of course, here and there some unexpected event occurs: the sun is eclipsed, the moon disappears behind the clouds, the river floods its banks, and so on. But these transient disturbances can never provoke anything but equally transient impressions that fade over a time. They could not possibly serve as the basis of those stable and permanent systems of ideas and practices that constitute religions. Normally, the course of nature is uniform, and uniformity does not produce strong emotions. We are projecting much more recent feelings onto our historical beginnings when we represent the savage as full of admiration at these marvels. He was too accustomed to them to be greatly surprised. Culture and reflection were needed to shake off this yoke of familiarity and to discover the marvellous aspects of that very

regularity. Moreover, as we have earlier remarked, it is not enough for us to admire an object for it to appear sacred, that is, for it to be marked by that quality that makes all direct contact with it seem like sacrilege and profanation. It is a distortion of what is specific in religious feeling to confuse it with every impression of admiring surprise.

But failing admiration, some say, there is one impression man cannot avoid in the presence of nature. He cannot have contact with nature without realizing that it outstrips and far surpasses him. Its vastness crushes him. This sensation of an infinite space that surrounds him, of an infinite time that went before and will follow the present moment, of forces infinitely superior to those at his disposal, cannot fail, it seems, to awaken inside him the idea that there is an infinite power outside him to which he is subject. Now, this idea becomes an essential element in our conception of the divine.

Let us remember, however, that the issue is how man could conclude that there are in reality two categories of radically heterogeneous and incomparable things. How could the spectacle of nature give us the idea of this duality? Nature is always and everywhere the same. It does not matter that it extends infinitely: there is nothing different beyond the scope of my gaze from that within it. The space I conceive of beyond the horizon is still space, identical to what I see. The time that flows endlessly is made up of moments identical to those I have lived. Extent, like duration, indefinitely repeats itself; if the portions I reach are not inherently sacred, how could the others be? The fact that I do not perceive them directly is not enough to transform them. A world of profane things may be unlimited, but it is no less profane. Some say that the physical forces affecting us are greater than our own. But sacred forces do not differ from profane forces simply by their greater intensity; they are other, and have special qualities that profane forces do not have. On the other hand, all the forces manifest in the universe are of the same nature, those inside us as well as those outside us. Most important, there is no reason to invest some with a sort of outstanding eminence in comparison to others. If religion were really born of the need to assign causes to physical phenomena, the forces imagined would be no more sacred than those the scientist conceives of today to account for the same facts. There would have been no sacred beings or, consequently, any religion.

Moreover, even assuming that this sensation of 'being overwhelmed' really could suggest the idea of religion, it might not have had this effect on the primitive—for he does not have this sensation. He has no awareness that cosmic forces are greatly superior to his own. Because science has not yet come along to teach him modesty, he attributes to himself a sovereignty over things that he does not have, but the illusion prevents him from feeling dominated by them. As we have said, he believes he can rule the elements, unleash the wind, force the rain to fall, stop the sun with a gesture, and so on.¹ Religion itself contributes to this sense of security, for it is believed to arm him with vast powers over nature. In part, rites are meant to help him impose his will on the world. So, far from being the result of man's feeling of smallness in the face of the universe, religions inspire the opposite feeling. [. . .]

Moreover, if the things of nature had truly become sacred beings because of their imposing forms or their manifest power, we would have to say that the sun, the moon, the sky, the mountains, the sea, the winds—in short, the great cosmic forces—were the first to be elevated to this level. For there is nothing more apt to strike the senses and the imagination. However, they were made divinities only recently. The first beings to which the cult was addressed (proof will be offered in the following chapters) were those with whom man was at least on equal footing: humble plants or animals like the duck, the hare, the kangaroo, the emu, the lizard, the caterpillar, the frog, and so on. Their objective qualities clearly could not have been the source of the religious feelings they inspired.

¹ We shall see how these illusions can be understood when we discuss the efficacy of rites and faith (see Book II, Ch. 2).

CHAPTER 4

TOTEMISM AS ELEMENTARY RELIGION

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE QUESTION METHOD OF TREATING IT

DESPITE their apparently opposite conclusions, the two systems we have just examined are in accord on one essential point: they pose the problem in identical terms. Both try to construct the notion of the divine from the sensations awakened in us by certain natural phenomena, whether physical or biological. For the animists, this is the dream; for the naturists, the starting point for religious development is certain cosmic manifestations. But for both the seed of the great divide between the sacred and the profane must be sought in nature—in the nature of man or the nature of the universe.

Such an undertaking, however, is impossible. It assumes a veritable creation *ex nihilo*. No fact of daily experience can give us the idea of a thing inherently outside the world of daily experience. Man as he appears to himself in his dreams is still only a man. The natural forces we perceive through our senses are only natural forces, however intense. Hence our criticism of both doctrines. To explain how these supposed givens of religious thought became sacred with no objective basis, it had to be accepted that a whole world of hallucinatory representations was superimposed on them, distorting them unrecognizably, and substituting pure phantasmagoria for reality. In one case, the illusions of the dream worked this transfiguration; in the other, the brilliant but futile parade of images evoked by words. In the end, both animists and naturists viewed religion as the product of a delirious interpretation.

One positive conclusion emerges from this critical examination. Since neither man nor nature is inherently sacred, this quality of sacredness must come from another source. Outside the human individual and the physical world, then, there must be some other reality in which the kind of delirium that characterizes all religion, in a sense, takes on meaning and objective value. In other words, beyond what has been called naturism and animism there must be another cult, more fundamental and more primitive, of which

animism and naturism are probably derivative forms or particular aspects.

This cult does indeed exist: it is what ethnographers have called totemism.

I

The word *totem* appears in ethnographic literature only at the end of the eighteenth century. We encounter it for the first time in the book by an Indian interpreter, J. Long, published in London in 1791.¹ For nearly half a century totemism was known exclusively as an American institution.² It was only in 1841 that Grey, in a famous passage,³ pointed out the existence of similar practices in Australia. From this time we began to realize that we were in the presence of a rather generalized system. [. . .]

Among others, two remarkably astute observers, Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen,⁴ discovered in the interior of the Australian continent a large number of tribes practising a fully elaborated, coherent religious system based on totemic beliefs. The results of their research were recorded in two works that have revived the study of totemism. The first, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*,⁵ deals

¹ John Long, *Voyages and Travels of an Indian Interpreter and Trader* (Cleveland: A. H. Clark, 1904).

² This idea was so widespread that Albert Reville made America the classic site of totemism (*Les Religions des peuples non civilisés*, i. 242).

³ George Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions in North-West and Western Australia*, vol. ii (London: T. & W. Boone, 1841), 228.

⁴ Spencer and Gillen may have been the first to study these tribes seriously, but they were not the first to mention them. Howitt had called attention to the social organization of the Wuaramongo (Warramunga of Spencer and Gillen) as early as 1889 in 'Further Notes on the Australian Class Systems', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 18 (1889), 44-5. The Arunta had already been superficially studied by Revd Louis Schulze ('The Aborigines of the Upper and Middle Finke River', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, 14, 2nd instalment); the organization of the Chigalee (the Tjingilli of Spencer and Gillen), of the Wombya, etc., by R. H. Mathews ('Wombya Organization of the Australian Aborigines', *American Anthropologist*, NS 2: 494; 'Divisions of Some West Australian Tribes', *ibid.* 185; *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 37: 151-2; and *Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, 32: 71 and 33: 111). The first results of the study of the Arunta had, moreover, been already cited in the *Report on the Work of the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia*, part IV (London: Dulau, 1896). The first part of this report is by Edward Sterling, the second by Gillen; the publication as a whole was directed by Baldwin Spencer.

⁵ London, 1899.

with the most central of these tribes, the Arunda, the Luritcha, and, a little to the south on the western shore of Lake Eyre, the Urabunna. The second, entitled *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*,¹ deals with societies to the north of the Urabunna; they occupy the territory from the Macdonnell Ranges to the Gulf of Carpentaria. To cite only the main groups, these are the Unmatjera, the Kaitish, the Warramunga, the Worgaia, the Tjingilli, the Binbinga, the Walpari, the Gnanji, and, on the very shores of the gulf, the Mara and the Anula.

More recently Carl Strehlow, a German missionary who also spent many years among the societies of central Australia, has begun to publish his own observations of two of these tribes, the Aranda and the Loritja (Arunda and Luritcha of Spencer and Gillen).² Fluent in the language spoken by these peoples, Strehlow was able to report a great number of totemic myths and religious chants, most of which are provided in their original texts. Despite differences in detail that are easily explained and whose importance has been greatly exaggerated, we shall see that Strehlow's observations, while completing, elaborating, sometimes even rectifying the observations of Spencer and Gillen, generally confirm their main points.

These discoveries stimulated an abundant literature, to which we shall return. Spencer and Gillen's efforts had a considerable influence, not only because they were the earliest, but because they presented the facts in a systematic form that both set the stage for subsequent studies and stimulated speculation. Their results were commented upon, debated, and interpreted in all sorts of ways. At the same time Howitt, whose fragmentary studies were scattered throughout many different publications, undertook to do for the southern tribes what Spencer and Gillen had done for those of central Australia. In his *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*,³ Howitt gives us a general picture of social organization among the peoples who occupy southern Australia, New South Wales, and a good part of Queensland. The progress made in this area suggested

¹ London, 1904.

² Carl Strehlow, *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* (Frankfurt: Joseph Baer, 1907).

³ London, 1904.

to Frazer the idea of supplementing his *Totemism* with a sort of compendium¹ bringing together all the important documents relating either to totemic religion or to kinship and marriage organization seen, rightly or wrongly, as bound to it. The goal of this work is not to give us a general and systematic view of totemism, but rather to put the necessary materials for such a construction at the disposal of researchers. [. . .]

II

This brief review suggests that Australia is the most favourable site for the study of totemism. For this reason we will make it the primary arena of observation.

In his *Totemism*, Frazer was chiefly determined to highlight every trace of totemism that could be discovered in history and ethnography. This led him to include in his study societies of radically different kinds and levels of culture: ancient Egypt, Arabia, Greece, and the southern Slavs are featured along with the tribes of Australia and America. This procedure was not surprising in a disciple of the anthropological school. This school does not mean to place religions in their social settings² and to differentiate them on this basis. On the contrary, as its name indicates, its goal is to reach beyond national and historical differences to the universal and truly human bases of religious life. Its proponents assume that man possesses a religious nature by virtue of his own constitution and independent of all social conditions, and they propose to determine what that is.³ In research of this kind, all peoples can be enlisted. Of course, it would be preferable to investigate the most primitive because among

¹ James George Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1910). The work begins with a reprinting of the monograph *Totemism*, reproduced without major changes.

² It should be noted, in this regard, that the most recent work, *Totemism and Exogamy*, marks an important step forward in Frazer's thought and method. Whenever he describes a tribe's religious or domestic institutions, he makes every effort to determine the geographic and social conditions in which that tribe is situated. Summary as these analyses may be, they still suggest a break with the old methods of the anthropological school.

³ Of course, we too consider that the chief object of the science of religions is to arrive at an understanding of the religious nature of man. But since we see it not as an inherent given but as a product of social causes, there can be no question of determining it apart from a social setting.

them this original nature is more likely to show through unencumbered; but since it can also be found among the more civilized, they too are naturally called upon to bear witness. All the more reason why those assumed to be closer to origins—all those confusingly brought together under the vague rubric *savages*—will be placed on the same level and investigated indiscriminately. Moreover, since from this point of view the facts are of interest only in proportion to their generality, researchers feel obliged to gather as many as possible. The circle of comparisons, they think, can never be too broad.

This cannot be our method, for several reasons.

First, for the sociologist as for the historian, social facts are a function of the social system to which they belong; they cannot be understood apart from it. That is why two facts that emerge from two different societies cannot be fruitfully compared simply because they bear some resemblance. These societies must also resemble each other internally, that is, they must be varieties of the same type. The comparative method would be impossible if social types did not exist, and it can be usefully applied only within the same type. How many mistakes have been made through a failure to respect this rule! In this way facts have been improperly compared that, despite external resemblances, had neither the same meaning nor the same implications: primitive democracy and the present-day variety, the collectivism of lower societies and current socialist tendencies, the monogamy common among the Australian tribes and that sanctioned by our codes, and so on. [. . .] Therefore, if we do not want to make the same mistakes, we must focus our research on one clearly defined type of society rather than extending our research to all possible societies.

It is essential to focus as narrowly as possible. We can usefully compare only facts that we know well. Now, when we try to encompass all sorts of societies and civilizations, we cannot know any with the necessary competence. When we assemble facts from every source for purposes of comparison, we are forced to take them indiscriminately, having neither the means nor the time to examine them in a critical way. These summary and chaotic comparisons have discredited the comparative method among a number of intelligent people. It can yield serious results only if it is applied to a rather limited number of societies, so that each of them can be studied with

sufficient precision. The crucial thing is to choose those in which the enquiry is likely to be most productive.

Furthermore, the quality of the facts is more important than their quantity. In our view, the question of whether totemism was more widespread or less so is quite secondary.¹ It interests us primarily because, by studying it, we hope to discover relationships that will help us understand what religion is. Now, to establish relationships, it is neither necessary nor always useful to heap one experiment on top of another; it is far more important that the experiments be done well and be truly significant. A single fact can illuminate a law, while a multitude of imprecise and vague observations can only produce confusion. In any area of science the scientist would be submerged by available facts if he did not choose among them. [. . .]

This is why, with one exception indicated below, we propose to limit our research to the Australian societies. They fulfil all the conditions just enumerated. They are perfectly homogeneous; although varieties can be discerned among them, they belong to the same type. Their homogeneity is so great that the frameworks of social organization are not only the same but designated by names that are either identical or equivalent in many tribes that are sometimes far away from one another. In addition, the most complete documentation we have is on Australian totemism. Finally, our initial proposal in this work is to study the most primitive and simplest religion that can be found. To discover such a religion, then, it is natural for us to address societies as close as possible to the origins of evolution, since these will offer the greatest chance to find and study it. Now, there are no societies that exhibit these features to a greater degree than the Australian tribes. Not only is their technology rudimentary—the house and even the hut are still unknown—but their organization is the most primitive and simplest we know. This is what we have elsewhere² called *clan-based organization*. Beginning in the next chapter, we will review its basic features.

However, while making Australia the main object of our research, it seems useful not to ignore entirely the societies in which totemism was first discovered: namely the Indian tribes of North America.

¹ The importance we ascribe to totemism, then, is entirely independent of its universality, a point that cannot be repeated too often.

² Émile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (3rd edn., Paris: Alcan, 1902), 150.

This extension of the field of comparison is perfectly legitimate. Of course the North American Indians are more advanced than the peoples of Australia. Their technology is much more developed: people live in houses or tents, and there are even fortified villages. The population density is much greater and centralization, which is entirely absent in Australia, is making an appearance. There are vast confederations, like that of the Iroquois, which recognize a central authority. There can be a complicated system of differentiated and hierarchically arranged classes. Yet the basic social structure, as in Australia, is always an organization based on clans. We are therefore in the presence not of two different types but of two varieties of the same type, which are quite close to one another. These are two successive moments of the same evolution; their similarity, then, is great enough to allow comparison.

Moreover, such comparisons can be useful. Precisely because the technology of the Indians is much more advanced than that of the Australians, certain aspects of their common social organization are more easily studied among the American tribes. As long as men have yet to take their first steps in the art of expressing their thought, it is not easy for the observer to perceive what moves them; nothing clearly translates what happens in those obscure minds that have only a muddled and fugitive sense of self. Religious symbols, for example, are only shapeless combinations of lines and colours whose meaning, as we shall see, is not easily decoded. There are certainly actions and movements by which inner states are expressed; but they are essentially fugitive and elude observation. This is why totemism was noticed sooner in North America than in Australia: it was more visible there, though relatively less central to religious life as a whole. Besides, where beliefs and institutions do not take on a definite material form, they are more likely to change under the influence of the slightest circumstance or be totally erased from memory. This is why the Australian clans have something amorphous and protean about them, while the corresponding organization in America more often has a greater stability and more clearly drawn contours. So, though American totemism is further from its origins than Australian totemism, it has more effectively preserved the remnants of certain important features.

In the second place, to understand an institution it is often good to

follow it into the advanced stages of its evolution,¹ for sometimes only when it is fully developed does its true meaning appear most clearly. In this respect, too, since American totemism has a longer history, it can help to clarify certain aspects of Australian totemism.² At the same time, it will put us in a better position to understand how totemism is connected to subsequent religious forms and to place it in the context of historical development.

In the analyses that follow, then, we will feel free to use certain facts gleaned from the Indian societies of North America. [. . .] We shall use the American data only as a supplement to shed light on the Australian data, which are the actual and immediate objects of our enquiry.

¹ To be sure, this is not always the case. As we have said, the simplest forms often help us understand the more complex. On this point, no rule of method automatically applies in all possible cases.

² This is why the individual totemism of America will help us understand its role and importance in Australia. Since individual totemism is very rudimentary in Australia, it would probably have passed unnoticed.

BOOK II

ELEMENTARY BELIEFS

CHAPTER I

CENTRAL TOTEMIC BELIEFS

I. THE TOTEM AS NAME AND EMBLEM

OUR study naturally falls into two sections. Since all religion is composed of conceptual representations and ritual practices, we must deal successively with the beliefs and rites peculiar to totemic religion. Of course, these elements of religious life are too closely allied to separate them entirely. While in principle the cult derives from the beliefs, it also affects them; the myth is often modelled on the rite in order to explain it, especially when the meaning is not, or is no longer, apparent. Conversely, there are beliefs that become clear only through the rites that express them. The two parts of the analysis, then, cannot help but overlap.* These two orders of facts are so different, however, that studying them separately is indispensable. As it is impossible to understand anything about a religion without knowing its underlying ideas, we must first familiarize ourselves with these ideas.

Our intention, however, is not to review here all the speculations of religious thought, even among the Australians. We want to reach the elementary notions at the basis of religion, but we need not follow these notions through the sometimes abstruse developments the mythological imagination has taken in these societies. When myths can help us understand these fundamental notions better, of course we will use them, but without making mythology itself the object of our study. Besides, insofar as mythology is a work of art, it is not the exclusive property of the science of religion. In addition, the mental processes that produce it are much too complex to be studied indirectly and obliquely. Mythology is a difficult problem that must be treated in itself and according to a specialized method.

But among the beliefs on which totemic religion is based, the most important are naturally those that concern the totem. And so we shall begin with these.

I

At the basis of most of the Australian tribes we find one group that holds a dominant place in collective life: the clan. It is characterized by two essential features.

First, the individuals who compose it consider themselves joined by a bond of kinship, but of a very special sort. This kinship does not come from specific blood relations with one another; members of the same clan are kin only if they bear the same name. They are not each other's fathers, mothers, sons or daughters, uncles or nephews in the sense we now give to these terms; and yet they regard each other as part of the same family, either broad or narrow depending on the size of the clan, solely because they are collectively designated by the same word. And if we say that they consider each other part of the same family, this is because they acknowledge mutual obligations identical to those that have always been incumbent upon kin: obligations of assistance, vengeance, mourning, the obligation not to intermarry, and so on.

But this first feature does not distinguish the clan from the Roman *gens* and the Greek γένος. For kinship among the nobility also issued exclusively from the fact that all the members of the *gens* bore the same name, the *nomen gentilicium*. And of course the *gens* is a clan, in a sense; but it is a variety of the genus that must not be confused with the Australian clan. What distinguishes the Australian clan is that the name it bears is also that of a definite species of material things with which it believes it has very special relations (whose nature we shall discuss below), namely, relations of kinship. The species that designates the clan collectively is called its *totem*. The totem of the clan is also that of each of its members.

Each clan has its own exclusive totem; two different clans of the same tribe cannot have the same totem. Indeed, one is part of a clan only by bearing a certain name. So all those who bear this name are members by the same right; they may be scattered across tribal territory, but they all have the same relations of kinship with one another. Consequently, two groups sharing the same totem must be two sections of the same clan. It often happens that the whole clan does not reside in the same place but has members in different places. Still, its unity is felt even without any geographical basis. [. . .]

Certainly in most cases the objects that serve as totems belong

to either the plant or the animal kingdom, but chiefly to the latter. Inanimate things are used much more rarely. Of more than five hundred totemic names recorded by Howitt from among the tribes of south-eastern Australia, less than forty are names outside of the plant or animal kingdoms: among these are clouds, rain, hail, ice, moon, sun, wind, autumn, summer, winter, certain stars, thunder, fire, smoke, water, red ochre, sea. Noteworthy is the very limited place given to heavenly bodies and, more generally, to the great cosmic phenomena that were to have such great success in the course of religious development. [. . .] We have seen that the totem is normally not an individual but a species or variety: it is not this particular kangaroo or crow, but the kangaroo or the emu in general. [. . .]

The way the totemic name is acquired involves the recruitment and organization of the clan rather than religion; it belongs more to the sociology of the family than to the sociology of religion.¹ So we shall confine ourselves to a brief summary of its main governing principles.

Depending on the tribe, one of three different rules is operative. In most societies, the child has the same totem as his mother, by birth. [. . .] Since in this case, by the rule of exogamy, the mother inevitably has a different totem from her husband yet lives on his territory, members of the same totem are necessarily dispersed to different places according to the vagaries of marriage contracts. Consequently, the totemic group has no territorial base.

Elsewhere, the totem is transmitted through the paternal line. In this case the child remains with his father, and the local group is essentially made up of people belonging to the same totem; only the married women represent foreign totems. In other words, each locality has its own totem. Until recent times, this mode of organization had been encountered in Australia only in tribes where totemism was in decline, for example among the Narrinyeri, for whom the totem has almost no religious character now. So it seemed reasonable to

¹ As we indicated in the preceding chapter, totemism involves both religion and the family, since the clan is a family. In lower societies, the problems are closely related. But both are so complex that they must be treated separately. Furthermore, primitive familial organization cannot be understood without a familiarity with primitive religious ideas, since these ideas govern as principles for family organization. This is why it was necessary to study totemism as religion before studying the totemic clan as a family group.

believe that there was a close connection between the totemic system and matrilineal filiation. But Spencer and Gillen observed in the northern part of central Australia a whole group of tribes who still practise totemic religion, yet the totem is transmitted through the paternal line. [. . .]

Finally, a third combination is observed among the Arunta and the Loritja. Here the totem of the child is not necessarily that of the mother or the father but that of the mythic ancestor who, through procedures that vary according to observers' reports,¹ mystically impregnated the mother at the time of conception. There is a set technique for knowing who this ancestor is and to which totemic group he belongs. [. . .]

Above and beyond the clan totems, there are the totems of phratries. These are not different in kind from the clan totems but must none the less be distinguished from them.

The word 'phratry' is used to designate a group of clans united by particular bonds of fraternity. Usually an Australian tribe is divided into two phratries, and the different clans are divided between them. There may be societies in which this organization has disappeared, but there is every reason to believe that it was a general rule. In any case, no Australian tribe has more than two phratries.

Now, in nearly every case in which the phratries have a name whose meaning could be established, this name is found to be that of an animal. This seems, then, to be a totem. [. . .] Thus among the Gourditch-Mara (Victoria), the two phratries are called Krokitch and Kaputch; the first of these words means white cockatoo, the second black cockatoo. [. . .] Among the Kuinmurbura, it is the white cockatoo and the crow. Other examples could be cited. We come to see the phratry, then, as an archaic clan that was broken up; the present clans would be the product of this break-up, and the solidarity that unites them a remnant of their original unity. It is true that in certain tribes the phratries no longer seem to have definite names; in others, where such names exist, their meaning is no longer

¹ According to Spencer and Gillen (*The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London, 1899), 123 f.), the ancestor's soul is incarnated in the body of the mother and then becomes the soul of the child. According to Strehlow (*Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* (Frankfurt: Joseph Baer, 1907), ii. 51 f.), although conception is the work of an ancestor, it does not imply reincarnation. But in both interpretations, the child's particular totem does not necessarily depend on that of his parents.

known, even to the natives. But this is not surprising. The phratries are certainly a primitive institution, since they are receding everywhere. It is the clans issuing from them that have emerged as primary. So it is natural that the original names of the phratries should be gradually erased from memory or no longer understood, for they must have belonged to a very archaic language that is no longer in use. [. . .]

The clan totems are in a way subordinate to the phratry totem. In principle, each clan belongs to one phratry and only one. It is quite rare for a clan to have members in the other phratry, and such cases are known to exist only among certain tribes of central Australia, notably the Arunta. Yet even where disturbing influences have produced overlappings of this kind, the majority of the clan belong entirely to one of the two halves of the tribe; only a minority belong to the other side.¹ So as a rule, the two phratries do not overlap; an individual's possible totems are determined by the phratry to which he belongs. In other words, the phratry totem is like a genus of which the clan totems are species. We shall see further on that this comparison is not purely metaphorical.

In addition to phratries and clans, we often find another, secondary group in Australian societies that is quite distinctive: the matrimonial class.

This is the name given to subdivisions of the phratry which vary in number from tribe to tribe—sometimes two, sometimes four per phratry.² Their recruitment and their functioning are governed by two principles. First, in each phratry, each generation belongs to a different class from the generation immediately preceding it. When there are only two classes per phratry, they alternate successively in each generation. The children belong to the class in which their parents are not members; but grandchildren belong to the same class as their grandparents. [. . .] When there are four classes per phratry instead of two, the system is more complex but the principle is the same. These four classes form in effect two pairs of two classes each,

¹ On this question, see my report [with Marcel Mauss]: 'Sur le totémisme', *L'Année sociologique*, 5 (1902), 82 ff.

² On the subject of Australian classes in general, see my article on 'La Prohibition de l'inceste et ses origines', *L'Année sociologique*, 1 (1898), 9 ff., and specifically on the tribes with eight classes, 'L'Organisation matrimoniale des sociétés australiennes', *L'Année sociologique*, 8 (1905), 118-47.

and these two classes alternate in every generation in the manner just indicated. Second, the members of a class can in principle marry into only one of the classes of the other phratry. Because this organization profoundly affects matrimonial relations, we call these groupings matrimonial classes.

Scholars have asked whether these classes sometimes have totems as the phratries and clans do. This question arose because in certain tribes in Queensland, each matrimonial class is subject to its own particular dietary restrictions. The individuals within it must abstain from eating the flesh of certain animals which the other classes are free to consume. Would not these animals be totems?

But dietary rules are not characteristic of totemism. The totem is, first and foremost, a name and, as we shall see, an emblem. Now in the societies in question, no matrimonial class bears an animal or plant name or has an emblem.¹ It is possible, of course, that these dietary prohibitions are derived indirectly from totemism. Conceivably the protected animals originally served as totems of clans that have disappeared, while the matrimonial classes remained. Indeed, they sometimes have a resilience that the clans do not have. As a result, these restrictions, unmoored from their original supports, may have spread throughout each class since other groupings no longer exist to which they might be attached. But we see that even if these rules originate in totemism, they represent only a weakened and distorted version of it.

Everything that has just been said of the totem in Australian societies applies to the Indian tribes of North America. The only difference is that totemic organization among the North American peoples has a stability and fixed boundaries that are missing in Australia. The Australian clans are not only very numerous but are nearly unlimited within the same tribe. Observers cite some as examples, but never manage to give us a complete list. This is because the list is never

¹ A few tribes are cited, however, in which matrimonial classes bear the names of animals or plants. This is the case among the Kabi (John Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1910), 150), tribes observed by Mrs Daisy M. Bates ('The Marriage Laws and Customs of the W. Australian Aborigines', *Victorian Geographical Journal*, 23-4: 47), and perhaps two tribes observed by Palmer. But these occurrences are very rare and their significance poorly understood. Moreover, it is not surprising that classes, as well as sexual groups, have sometimes adopted the names of animals. This unusual extension of totemic names does nothing to modify our conception of totemism.

definitively complete. The same process of segmentation that originally broke up the phratry and gave rise to clans proper continues endlessly within them. As a result of this progressive fragmentation, a clan often has only a very reduced membership. In America, by contrast, the form of the totemic system is better defined. The tribes are, on average, bigger than in Australia, but the clans are less numerous. The same tribe rarely contains more than ten clans and often less, so one constitutes a much more significant grouping. The point is that their number is more fixed: the natives know how many there are and they tell us.

This difference is due to their superior social engineering. From the moment these tribes were observed for the first time, these social groups were firmly rooted in the soil and so better able to resist the forces of dispersal impinging on them. At the same time, the society already had too vivid a sense of its own unity to remain unconscious of itself and its constituent parts. The example of the American societies thus gives us a better understanding of clan-based organization. It would be a mistake to judge this organization by the model current in Australia. There, it is in a state of flux and dissolution that is not normal; and this must be seen, rather, as the result of degeneration, due as much to the natural erosion of time as to the disorganizing influence of the whites. Of course, it is unlikely that the Australian clans were ever as large and as structurally solid as the American clans. Yet there must have been a time when the gap between the two was not as great as it is today. The American societies would never have managed to construct such a solid armature if the clan had always been so fluid and insubstantial.

This greater stability has allowed the archaic system of the phratries to persist in America with a clarity and prominence it no longer has in Australia. We have just seen that on the Australian continent the phratry is in decline. [. . .] By contrast, in certain places in America, this system has remained primary. The tribes on the northwest coast, the Tlinkit and the Haida in particular, have reached a relatively advanced level of civilization. Yet they are divided into two phratries, which are subdivided in turn into a certain number of clans: phratries of the Crow and the Wolf among the Tlinkit, the Eagle and the Crow among the Haida. And this division is not merely nominal; it corresponds to current custom and has a profound effect on daily life. Compared to the distance between the

phratries, the moral distance that separates the clans is minor. [. . .] On this point as well it was in our interest not to neglect the American tribes, since among them we can directly observe those phratry totems that are present in Australia only as obscure vestiges.

II

But the totem is not only a name; it is an emblem, a virtual coat of arms whose resemblance to the heraldic coat of arms has often been noted. [. . .]

The nobility of the feudal period sculpted, engraved, and generally displayed their armorial bearings on the walls of their castles, on their weapons, on all kinds of objects belonging to them. The blacks of Australia and the Indians of North America do the same with their totems. The Indians who accompanied Samuel Hearne painted their totems on their shields before going into battle. [. . .] Among the Tlinkit, when a conflict erupts between two clans, the champions of the two enemy groups wear helmets decorated with the figures of their respective totems. [. . .]

Wherever the society has become sedentary, where the house has replaced the tent and the plastic arts are more developed, the totem is carved on wood and walls. This has happened, for example, among the Haida, the Tsimshian, the Salish, and the Tlinkit. [. . .] These totems consist of animal forms combined in certain cases with human forms and sculpted on posts that stand beside the front door up to fifteen metres high; they are usually painted in very bright colours. [. . .]

The preceding examples are borrowed exclusively from the Indians of North America. These sculptures, engravings, and representations are possible only where the technology of the plastic arts has already reached a degree of sophistication that the Australian tribes have not yet achieved. As a result, totemic representations of the kind just mentioned are rarer and less apparent in Australia. However, there are some documented cases. Among the Warramunga, at the end of funeral ceremonies, the bones of the dead are buried after being dried and reduced to powder; next to the place where they are buried, a figure representing the totem is traced on the ground. Among the Mara and the Anula, the body is placed in a piece of hollowed wood which is also decorated with drawings typical of the

totem. [. . .] The natives of Upper Darling engrave their shields with totemic images. [. . .] These totemic drawings may even be more common than we think, since, for reasons discussed below, it is not always easy to perceive their true meaning.

These varied facts already attest to the considerable place the totem occupies in the social life of primitive peoples. Until now, however, it has seemed to us relatively external to man himself; we have seen it represented only on things. But totemic images are not only reproduced on the walls of houses, the sides of canoes, on weapons, tools, and tombs; they are also found on the bodies of men. The tribesmen do not only put their coat of arms on the things they own, but they wear it on their persons; it is imprinted in their flesh and becomes part of them, and this mode of representation is by far the most important.

In fact, it is a general rule that the members of each clan try to give themselves the external appearance of their totem. At certain religious festivals, the dignitary who conducts the ceremony wears a garment that wholly or in part represents the body of the animal whose name the clan bears. Special masks are used for this purpose. [. . .] Elsewhere, when the totem is a bird, the individuals wear its feathers on their heads. Among the Iowa, each clan has a special way of cutting its hair. In the clan of the Eagle, two large tufts are arranged on the forehead, while another hangs down behind. In the Buffalo clan, the hair is arranged in the form of horns. [. . .]

But it is most often on the body itself that the totemic mark is imprinted, for this is a mode of representation available to less advanced societies. Conceivably, the common practice of pulling a young man's two front teeth when he reaches puberty may be to imitate the form of the totem. This is not established fact, but it is worth noting that the natives themselves sometimes explain the practice in this way. For example, among the Arunta, the extraction of teeth is practised only in the clan of rain and water. According to tradition, this operation is performed to make that part of the face resemble certain clearly etched black clouds that pass over announcing the coming rain, and so are considered part of the same family of things. This is proof that the native himself is aware that the purpose of these deformations is to give him the appearance of his totem, at least in conventional terms. Again, among the Arunta, during the rites of subincision,* specified cuts are made on the sisters

and the future wife of the novice; the form of the resulting scars is also represented on a sacred object called the *churinga*, discussed below. And we will see that the lines drawn on the *churinga* are emblematic of the totem. [. .]

The tattoos made through mutilation or scarring do not always have a totemic meaning, but the simple drawings made on the body are a different matter: they are usually representations of the totem. True, the native does not wear them in daily life. When he is involved in purely economic occupations, when small family groups go off to hunt and fish, he does not encumber himself with this decoration, which can be quite complicated. But when the clans meet to share a communal life and attend religious ceremonies, he is obliged to adorn himself in this way. [. .] Among the Arunta, at the most solemn moment of the initiation—its crowning and consecration, when the neophyte is admitted to the sanctuary where all the sacred objects of the clan are kept—the young man is adorned with an emblematic painting representing his own totem. [. .]

III

These totemic decorations suggest that the totem is not just a name and an emblem. While the totem is a collective label, it also has a religious character, as its use in religious ceremonies attests. Indeed, things are classified as sacred and profane in relation to the totem's religious character. It is the classic example of a sacred thing.

The tribes of central Australia, chiefly the Arunta, the Loritja, the Kaitish, the Unmatjera, and the Ilpirra, use certain instruments in their rites which among the Arunta, according to Spencer and Gillen, are called *churingas*, and according to Strehlow, *tjurungas*.¹ These are pieces of wood or bits of polished stone varying in shape but generally oval or oblong. Each totemic group has a more or less significant collection of them. *On each of them is engraved a drawing that represents the totem of this group.* Some of these *churingas* are pierced at one end with a hole which is threaded with a thong made of human hair or opossum fur. Those made of wood and pierced in this way serve precisely the same purpose as those cultic instruments

¹ Other names are used in other tribes. We give a generic meaning to the Arunta term because in this tribe the *churingas* have the greatest importance and are most thoroughly studied.

to which English ethnographers have given the name *bull-roarers*. They are rapidly spun through the air by their thong to produce the same sort of humming sound made by the *devils* our children use as toys today. This deafening sound has a ritual significance and accompanies all ceremonies of any importance. *Churingas* of this kind, then, are true bull-roarers. But there are others that are not made of wood or pierced, and so cannot be used in this way. None the less they inspire the same feelings of religious respect.

Indeed, every *churinga*, whatever its purpose, counts among the supremely sacred things, and nothing has greater religious dignity. [. . .] Profane persons—in other words, women and young men not yet initiated into religious life—may not touch or see the *churingas*; they are only allowed to glimpse them from a distance, and then only rarely.¹

The *churingas* are piously kept in a special place called, among the Arunta, the *ertnatulunga*. This is a small subterranean cave hidden in a deserted place. The entrance is carefully closed with stones so artfully arranged that the passing stranger does not suspect that the clan's religious treasure lies nearby. The sacred character of the *churingas* is such that it is transferred to this depository: women and the uninitiated are not allowed near. Young men have access to it only when their initiation is complete; and some are judged worthy of this privilege only after several years of trials. The religious sanctity of the place emanates even beyond it and is transferred to its surroundings: everything participates in this sacred character and is for that reason shielded from contamination by the profane. If one man is being chased by another and reaches the *ertnatulunga*, he is saved; he cannot be seized there. Even a wounded animal seeking refuge in this place must be respected. Quarrelling is forbidden there. As we say in Germanic societies, it is a place of peace; it is the sanctuary of the totemic group and a true place of asylum.

But the *churinga*'s virtues are manifest not only by the way the profane is kept at a distance. The object is isolated this way because it is a thing of great religious value, and its loss would seriously harm the collectivity and individuals. It has all sorts of marvellous properties: touching it can cure wounds, especially those resulting from

¹ Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 130–2; Strehlow, *Aranda*, ii. 78. A woman who has seen a *churinga* and the man who has shown it to her are both put to death.

circumcision; it is equally effective against illness; it makes beards grow; it confers important powers on the totemic species, ensuring its normal reproduction; it gives men strength, courage, and perseverance, while demoralizing and weakening their enemies. [. . .] And no ritual instrument holds a more important place in religious ceremonies. Its powers are transferred either to officiants or congregants through various anointings: *churingas* are coated with fat and rubbed against the limbs and the stomachs of the faithful. Or they are covered with a layer of down that flies away in all directions when they are spun around—another way of disseminating their special virtues.

But *churingas* are not only useful to individuals; the collective fate of the whole clan depends on them. Their loss is a disaster, the greatest misfortune that can happen to the group. [. . .] And *churingas* are not available to private persons to use as they like; the *ertnatulunga* where they are kept is under the direction of the group's chief. Of course, each individual has special rights over some of them;¹ yet if he owns them to some extent, he may use them only with the chief's consent and guidance. This is a collective treasure, the clan's Holy Ark.* [. . .]

In themselves *churingas* are objects of wood and stone like so many others; they are distinct from profane things of the same kind in only one respect: they are engraved or painted with the totemic mark. This mark, and this mark alone, confers their sacred character. [. . .] It is to this image that the rite's gestures are addressed, and this image sanctifies the object on which it is engraved.

Among the Arunta and in neighbouring tribes there are two other liturgical instruments that are clearly attached to the totem and to the *churinga* itself, and usually have a part in their creation: the *nurtunja* and the *wanunga*.* [. . .] Figuring in a multitude of important rites, the *nurtunja* and the *wanunga* are objects of religious respect quite similar to the respect inspired by *churingas*. Making and erecting them is done with the greatest solemnity. Set in the ground or carried by an officiant, they mark the central point of the ceremony: dances and rites take place around them. During the initiation, the novice is led to the foot of a *nurtunja* that has been erected for this

¹ Each individual has a personal bond first of all to a special *churinga* that serves him as a life sign, then to those that he has inherited from his relatives.

purpose. 'Here', he is told, 'is the *nurtunja* of your father; it has already turned out fine men.' After which the initiated must kiss the *nurtunja*.¹ With this kiss he enters into relations with the religious principle that is thought to reside in it; this is a true communion that must give the young man the strength necessary to endure the ordeal of subincision. [. . .]

This sacred character comes only from its status as the material representation of the totem. Indeed, the vertical lines or rings of feathers that cover it, or the cords of different colours that bind the arms of the *wananga* to the central axis, are not arranged arbitrarily, at the whim of the fabricators; they must create a form narrowly defined by tradition which, in the minds of the natives, represents the totem. [. . .]

Thus the *churinga*, the *nurtunja*, and the *wananga* owe their religious nature exclusively to the fact that they bear the totemic emblem. It is this emblem that is sacred. And it preserves its sacred character on any object that bears its likeness. It is sometimes painted on rocks: these paintings are called *churinga ilkinia*, sacred drawings. The decorations with which officiants and congregants adorn themselves in religious ceremonies have the same name, and women and children are forbidden to see them.² During certain rites, the totem is sometimes drawn on the ground. The technique itself bears witness to the feelings that inspire this drawing and the great value attributed to it. The drawing is traced on a plot of ground that has been sprinkled and saturated with human blood, and we shall see below that blood itself is a sacred liquid used only in religious rituals. Once the image has been executed, the faithful remain seated on the ground before it in an attitude of utter devotion. [. . .]

In order to understand why the totemic representations are so sacred, it is of some interest to know what they consist of.

Among the Indians of North America, they are painted, engraved, or sculpted images that attempt to reproduce the external appearance of the totemic animal as faithfully as possible. The methods are those we employ today in similar cases, only they are generally

¹ Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (London, 1904), 342; *Native Tribes*, 309.

² *Native Tribes*, 624.

cruder. But this does not hold true for Australia, and of course it is in the Australian societies that we must seek the origins of these representations. Although the Australian is quite capable of imitating the forms of things, at least in a rudimentary way, sacred decorations are normally exempt from concerns of this kind: they consist mainly of geometric designs made on the *churingas* or on men's bodies. They are straight or curved lines painted in different ways, which taken together can have only a conventional meaning. The relation between the drawing and the thing drawn is so indirect and distant that the uninitiated cannot decipher it. Only members of the clan can say what meaning they attach to this or that combination of lines. Generally, men and women are represented by semicircles, animals by complete circles or spirals, the tracks of a man or an animal by lines of dots, and so forth. The meaning of the figures produced by these methods is so arbitrary that the same drawing can have two different meanings for the people of two totems, representing one animal for some, another animal or a plant for others. [. . .]

These facts confirm that the Australian is strongly inclined to represent his totem, not to have a constant reminder of it in the form of a portrait but rather because he feels the need to represent his idea of it by a material and external sign, whatever this may be. We are still not ready to understand what moves the primitive to inscribe his notion of his totem on his person and on different objects; but it was important to state directly the nature of the need that generated these varied representations.¹

¹ Moreover, these drawings and paintings undoubtedly have an aesthetic character as well; they are an early form of art. Since they are also, above all, a written language, it follows that the origins of drawing and writing overlap. It certainly seems that man must have begun to draw less to fix onto wood or stone the beautiful shapes that charmed his senses than to translate his thought into material form.

CHAPTER 2

CENTRAL TOTEMIC BELIEFS (Continued)

II. THE TOTEMIC ANIMAL AND MAN

TOTEMIC images are not the only sacred things. There are real beings who are also the object of rites because of their relationship to the totem. These are primarily creatures of the totemic species and members of the clan.

I

First, since the drawings that represent the totem arouse religious feelings, it is natural that the things represented by these drawings should have the same property to some degree.

These are mostly animals and plants. Since the profane role of plants and animals is usually to serve as food, the sacred character of the totemic plant or animal is acknowledged in the prohibition against eating it. Of course, because these are holy things they can be part of certain mystic meals, and we shall see that in fact they sometimes serve as virtual sacraments. But in general they cannot be used for ordinary consumption. Anyone who defies this prohibition exposes himself to the gravest dangers. Not that the group always intervenes to check the committed infraction; but they believe that the sacrilege automatically results in death. A formidable principle is thought to reside in the totemic plant or animal that cannot enter a profane organism without disorganizing or destroying it. [. . .]

Yet while the prohibition is categorical in a great many tribes (with the exceptions indicated below), it clearly tends to become weaker to the degree that the old totemic organization breaks down. But even the restrictions that still persist show that the weakening of these prohibitions has not come about easily. For example, where eating the totemic plant or animal is permitted, this is not yet unconditional, and only a small amount can be consumed at a time. To eat more than this limited amount constitutes a ritual offence that has serious consequences. Elsewhere, the prohibition applies exclusively to the parts regarded as most precious, that is, most

sacred: for example the eggs or the fat. In still other places, unlimited consumption is tolerated only if the animal in question has not yet reached full maturity. In this case the animal's sacred nature is probably regarded as incomplete. So the barrier that isolates and protects the totemic creature is lowered only gradually and not without strong resistance that bears witness to its original status.

It is true that Spencer and Gillen think these restrictions were not the remnants of a strict prohibition that is continually eroded but the prelude to an interdiction in the process of being established. In their view, there was once total freedom of consumption, and the limitations at present in place are relatively recent. They believe they have found proof of their thesis in the two following facts. First, as we have said, there are solemn occasions when the people of the clan or their chief not only may but must eat the totemic animal or plant. Second, myths record that the great ancestral founders of the clans regularly ate their totem. They would have it that these narratives can only be understood as echoes of a time when the present prohibitions did not exist.

But the fact that a rather moderate consumption of the totem is ritually obligatory during certain religious solemnities in no way implies that it ever served as ordinary food. Quite the contrary, the food eaten during these mystic meals is inherently sacred and forbidden to the profane. As for myths, to view them so readily as historical documents is to employ a rather hasty critical method. As a rule the purpose of myths is to interpret existing rites rather than to commemorate past events; they are more an explanation of the present than a history. In this case, those traditions in which the ancestors of some fabled past would have eaten their totem are in perfect accord with the beliefs and rites still in force. The elders and others who have achieved a place of great religious prominence are free of the prohibitions governing the common man. They may eat holy things because they are holy themselves; moreover, this rule is not peculiar to totemism but is found in a great variety of religions. Since the ancestral heroes were nearly gods, it must have seemed all the more natural for them to eat sacred food; but this is no reason to grant the same privilege to the profane.

Yet it is neither certain nor even likely that the prohibition was ever absolute. It seems always to have been suspended in case of necessity, for example when the native is starving and has nothing

else to eat, and all the more so when the totem is food that man cannot do without. A great many tribes, for example, have a water totem—a case where a strict prohibition is clearly impossible. However, even in this instance the concession is hedged around by restrictions showing that it is a departure from an accepted principle. Among the Kaitish and the Warramunga, a man of this totem cannot drink water freely: he is forbidden to draw it himself and can receive it only from the hands of another person who must belong to the phratry to which he does not belong. [. . .]

A prohibition against killing the totem, or picking it in the case of a plant, is often added to the prohibition against eating it. Yet here again there are certainly exceptions and allowances, notably in cases of necessity when, for example, the totem is a dangerous animal¹ or when there is nothing else to eat. There are even tribes that prohibit a man from hunting his totem animal for himself, yet permit him to kill it for someone else. In general, however, the way this act is accomplished suggests there is something illicit about it. The hunter asks for pardon, as in the commission of a sin; he displays the sorrow and repugnance he feels; and he takes the necessary precautions to ensure that the animal suffers as little as possible. [. . .]

If we now compare these various prohibitions with those that surround the totemic emblem, it seems—contrary to what we might predict—that those surrounding the totem emblem are more numerous, stricter, more sternly imperative. Figures of any sort representing the totem are surrounded by a respect palpably greater than that inspired by the creature whose form is represented. The *churingas*, the *nurtunja*, the *waninga* must never be handled by women or the uninitiated, who are only allowed to glimpse them on rare occasions from a respectful distance. By contrast, the plant or animal whose name the clan bears can be seen and touched by everyone. The *churingas* are kept in a sort of temple, on whose threshold the sounds of profane life subside into silence. This is the domain of holy things. By contrast, totemic animals and plants live in the profane realm and participate in daily life. And since the number and importance of the prohibitions that isolate a sacred thing and

¹ And yet not in all cases. The Arunta of the Mosquito totem must not kill that insect, even when this is inconvenient, but must settle for swatting it off (Strehlow, *Aranda*, ii. 58. Cf. Revd George Taplin, 'The Narringeri', in James Dominick Woods, *The Native Tribes of South Australia* (Adelaide: E. S. Wigg, 1879), 63).

withdraw it from circulation correspond to the degree of holiness with which it is invested, we arrive at the remarkable result that *the images of the totemic being are more sacred than the totemic being itself*. Moreover, it is the *churinga* and the *nurtunja* that hold the primary place in the ceremonies of the cult; the actual animal makes only very rare appearances. [. . .]

II

We must now determine man's place in the system of religious things.

We are inclined by a whole set of acquired habits and by the very force of language to conceive of the common man, the simple worshipper, as an essentially profane being. This conception may never be literally true of any religion,¹ and it does not apply to totemism. Each member of the clan is invested with a sacred nature that is not significantly inferior to the sacred nature we have just identified in the animal. The reason for this personal sanctity is that man believes he is both a man in the usual sense of the word and an animal or plant of the totemic species.

Indeed, he bears its name. And the identity of the name implies an identity of nature. Having the same name is not considered merely an external sign of having the same nature, but logically assumes it. For in the primitive mind the name is not merely a word, a combination of sounds, but part of one's being, and even something essential. A member of the Kangaroo clan calls himself a kangaroo, and in a sense he is an animal of this species. 'A man', say Spencer and Gillen, 'regards the being that is his totem as the same as himself. A native with whom we were discussing this matter responded by showing us a photograph we had just taken of him: "Look, this is exactly the same thing I am. Well! It's the same with the kangaroo." The kangaroo was his totem.'² Each individual thus has a double nature: two beings coexist in him, a man and an animal.

¹ Perhaps there is no religion that regards man as an exclusively profane being. For the Christian, there is something sacred about the soul that each of us bears within us, and that constitutes the very essence of our personality. As we shall see, this conception of the soul is as old as religious thought. But Man's place in the hierarchy of sacred things is rather elevated.

² Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 202.

To lend a semblance of intelligibility to this duality, which is so strange to us, the primitive has created myths that surely explain nothing and merely displace the difficulty, but seem by that displacement to mitigate its shocking logic. Though varying in details, these myths are all constructed on the same plan: their aim is to establish genealogical relations between man and the totemic animal that make man the animal's kin. By this common origin, which is represented in different ways, the natives believe they have accounted for their common nature. The Narrinyeri, for example, have imagined that some of the first men had the power to transform themselves into beasts. Other Australian societies place at the origin of humanity either strange animals, from which men descended in some mysterious fashion, or mixed beings intermediary between the two species, or even formless creatures difficult to represent, lacking any specific organ or defined shape, whose various body parts are barely sketched out. Mythic powers, sometimes conceived as animals, then intervened and transformed these ambiguous and unnameable beings into men, representing, according to Spencer and Gillen, 'a transitional phase between man and animal'.¹ These transformations are presented to us as the result of violent and quasi-surgical operations. It is by the blows of an axe or, when the transformer is a bird, pecks with a beak that the human individual is carved out of this amorphous mass, arms and legs separated from one another, the mouth opened and nostrils pierced. Analogous legends are found in America, though because the mentality of these peoples is more developed, their representations are not as muddled and disconcerting. [. . .]

True, societies exist (Haida, Tlinkit, Tsimshian) in which the notion that man is born of an animal or plant is no longer accepted: the idea of an affinity between animals of the totemic species and the members of the clan has none the less survived, and this is explained in myths that are different from those previously discussed yet reminiscent of them. Here we have one of their central themes. The eponymous ancestor is represented as a human being who, after many vicissitudes, is led to live for some time among legendary animals of the same species that gave the clan its name. As a result of this intimate and prolonged involvement, he becomes so like his new

¹ Ibid. 389.

companions that when he returns among men, they no longer recognize him. So he is given the name of the animal he resembles. From his sojourn in this mythic land he has brought back the totemic emblem with the powers and virtues thought to be attached to it. In this case as in those earlier instances, man is assumed to participate in the nature of the animal, although this participation is conceived somewhat differently.

He too, then, has something sacred about him. Diffused throughout the body, this quality is especially apparent at certain privileged sites. There are organs and tissues that are particularly marked, above all blood and hair.

First of all, human blood is so holy that the tribes of central Australia very often use it to consecrate the most respected cultic instruments. In certain cases the *nurtunja*, for example, is religiously anointed from top to bottom with human blood. Among the Arunta, men of the Emu clan draw the sacred emblem on ground completely soaked in blood. [. . .] Moreover, the religious nature of blood also explains the religious role of red ochre and its frequent use in certain ceremonies; the *churingas* are rubbed with it, and it is used in ritual decorations. Red ochre is thought to be a substance related to blood because of its colour. Several deposits of red ochre found at different sites on Arunta territory are said to be coagulated blood that certain heroines of the mythic period had shed on the ground.

Hair has analogous properties. The natives of central Australia wear belts made of human hair which have a religious function: they are used as wrappings for certain cult objects. When a man has lent a friend one of his *churingas*, the borrower makes a gift of hair to the lender as a sign of gratitude; these two kinds of things are considered to be of the same order and of equal value. Hence hair-cutting is a ritual act accompanied by specific ceremonies: the individual having his hair cut must squat on the ground with his face turned toward the place where the legendary ancestors on his mother's side are said to have made their encampment.

For the same reason, as soon as a man dies, his hair is cut and placed in a secluded spot, for neither women nor the uninitiated have the right to see it; and there, far from profane eyes, the belts are woven.

Other organic tissues could be named that to varying degrees display analogous properties—favourites are the foreskin, the fat of

the liver, and so on. But there is no need to provide multiple examples. Those already given confirm that there is something in man that keeps the profane at a distance and has a religious efficacy; in other words, the human body conceals in its depths a sacred principle that displays itself outwardly in special circumstances. This principle is not different in kind from that which gives the totem its religious character. Indeed, we have just seen that various substances where it is most prominently embodied enter into the ritual composition of cultic instruments (the *nurtunja*, totemic drawings), or are used in anointings for the purpose of reanimating the virtues of either the *churingas* or the sacred rocks. Therefore these are things that belong to the same species.

However, the religious dignity that is inherent, in this sense, in each member of the clan is not equally present in everyone. Men possess it to a higher degree than women, who seem profane by comparison.¹ Every time there is an assembly of either the totemic group or the tribe, the men form a camp apart from the women and closed to them. The men are effectively separated. But men differ too in the way they are marked by their religious nature. Since uninitiated young men are totally lacking such a nature, they are not admitted to the ceremonies. And this religious nature reaches its full intensity among old men. They are so sacred that they are permitted certain things forbidden to ordinary folk: they can eat the totemic animal more freely, and there are even tribes in which they are exempt from dietary restrictions.

We must therefore guard against seeing totemism as a kind of zoolatry. Since man himself belongs to the sacred world, he does not worship the animals or plants whose name he bears the way another might worship his god. Relations between a man and his totem are rather those of two beings who are clearly on the same level and of equal value. At most we can say that in some cases, the animal seems to occupy a slightly more elevated place in the hierarchy of sacred

¹ This is not to say that the woman is absolutely profane. In myths, at least among the Arunta, she plays a much more important religious role than she plays in reality (Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 195-6). Even now, she participates in certain initiation rites. And her blood has religious powers (see *ibid.* 464; cf. Durkheim, 'La Prohibition de l'inceste et ses origines', 51 ff.).

The woman's complex situation is the source of the exogamic prohibitions. We will not discuss them here because they are more directly concerned with the problem of domestic and matrimonial organization.

things. This is why it is sometimes called the father or grandfather of the men of the clan, which seems to indicate that they feel they are morally dependent on it. Yet often, perhaps most often, the expressions used denote a feeling of equality. The totemic animal is called the friend, the elder brother of his human kin. In short, the ties between them and him more closely resemble those that unite members of the same family: as the Buondik say, animals and men are made of the same flesh. Because of this kinship man sees the animals of the totemic species as benevolent partners he can count on for help. [. . .]

Sometimes man seems to have a sort of mystic ownership of his particular totem. The prohibition against killing and eating it naturally applies only to members of the clan; it could not be extended to outsiders without making life materially impossible. In a tribe like the Arunta, in which there are so many different totems, if it were forbidden to eat not only the animal or plant whose name one bears but also all the animals and plants that serve as totems to other clans, dietary resources would be reduced to nothing. There are, however, tribes in which unlimited consumption of the totemic plant or animal is not permitted, even to outsiders. Among the Wakelbura, this consumption must not take place in the presence of people belonging to the totem. Elsewhere their permission is required. Among the Kaitish and the Unmatjera, for example, when a man of the Emu clan, finding himself in a locality occupied by the Grass Seed clan, gathers some of these seeds, he must go to the chief before eating them and say to him: 'I have gathered these seeds on your land.' To which the chief replies: 'That is fine; you may eat them.' But if the man of the Emu clan were to eat the grass seeds without asking permission, it is believed that he would fall ill and possibly die.¹ [. . .] The men of the totem, then, play the role of owners, although clearly this is a special sort of ownership that is difficult for us to grasp.

¹ *Northern Tribes*, 159-60.

CHAPTER 3

CENTRAL TOTEMIC BELIEFS (Continued)

III. THE COSMOLOGICAL SYSTEM OF TOTEMISM AND THE NOTION OF GENUS

WE begin to see that totemism is a much more complex religion than it seemed at first. We have already identified three categories of things that it recognizes as sacred in varying degrees: the totemic emblem, the plant or animal represented by this emblem, and the members of the clan. Yet this picture is not complete. A religion is not simply a collection of fragmentary beliefs about very specific objects of the sort just mentioned. To a greater or lesser extent, all known religions have been systems of ideas that embrace the universality of things and give us a total representation of the world. For totemism to be considered a religion comparable to others, it too must offer a conception of the universe. And it satisfies this condition.

I

This aspect of totemism has been largely neglected because we have had too narrow an idea of the clan. It is usually seen as merely a group of human beings, a simple subdivision of the tribe composed only of men. But by reasoning in this way we are substituting our European ideas for those the primitive has about the world and society. For the Australian, things themselves—all things that inhabit the universe—are part of the tribe. They are among its constituent elements and its regular members. They have a definite place in the framework of society, just as men do: 'The savage of South Australia', Fison says, 'considers the universe as a large tribe to one of whose divisions he belongs; and all things that are classified in the same group as he, both animate and inanimate, are parts of the body of which he himself is a part.' By virtue of this principle, when

¹ Lorimer Fison and Alfred William Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai: Group Marriage and Relationship, and Marriage by Elopement, Drawn Chiefly from the Usage of the Australian Aborigines* (Melbourne: G. Robertson, 1880), 170.

the tribe is divided into two phratries, all known beings are divided between them. [. . .] The Port Mackay tribe in Queensland is made up of two phratries that bear the names Yungaroo and Wootaroo, and likewise in neighbouring tribes. According to Bridgmann, 'All animate and inanimate things are divided by these tribes into two classes called Yungaroo and Wootaroo.'¹ But this classification does not stop here. The men of each phratry are divided among a certain number of clans; similarly, the things assigned to each phratry are divided in turn among the clans that compose it. This tree, for example, will be assigned to the Kangaroo clan and to it alone, and like the human members of the clan, it will have the Kangaroo as its totem; that tree will belong to the Snake clan; the clouds will be assigned to a certain totem, the Sun to another, etc. Thus all known beings are distributed in a kind of table, a systematic classification that embraces all of nature.

We have reproduced elsewhere a certain number of these classifications;² so here we will mention only a few examples. One of the best-known classifications has been observed in the Mount Gambier tribe. This tribe is composed of two phratries that bear the names Kumite and Kroki, each of which is in turn divided into five clans. Now, 'Everything in nature belongs to one or the other of those ten clans';³ Fison and Howitt say that all things are 'included' in them. They are, in fact, classified under these ten totems like species under their respective genera. This is evident in Table 1, constructed according to information gathered by Curr and by Fison and Howitt.

The list of things attached to each clan is, of course, quite incomplete. [. . .]

The same organization is found among the North American Indians. [. . .] An echo of these ideas persists even in the most advanced societies. Among the Haida, all the gods and mythical beings appointed to different natural phenomena are classified in

¹ Edward Micklethwaite Curr, *The Australian Race: Its Origin, Languages, Customs* . . . (Melbourne: J. Ferres, 1886-7), iii. 45; Robert Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria* (Melbourne: J. Ferres, 1878), i. 91; Fison and Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, 168.

² Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, 'De quelques formes primitives de classification: contribution à l'étude des représentations collectives', *L'Année sociologique*, 6 (1903), 1 ff.

³ Curr, *The Australian Race*, iii. 461.

TABLE I

<i>Phratries</i>	<i>Clans</i>	<i>Things classified in each clan</i>
Kumite	The fishing falcon	Smoke, honeysuckle, certain trees, etc.
	The pelican	Blackwood trees, dogs, fire, ice, etc.
	The crow	Rain, thunder, lightning, clouds, hail, winter, etc.
	Black cockatoos	Stars, moon, etc.
	Harmless snakes	Fish, seal, eel, trees with fibrous bark, etc.
Kroki	The tea tree	Duck, crayfish, owl, etc.
	An edible root	Buzzard, quail, a kind of kangaroo, etc.
	Crestless white cockatoos	Kangaroo, summer, sun, wind, autumn, etc.

Note: There are no details for the fourth and fifth Kroki clans.

one or the other of the two phratries of the tribe, just as men are: some are Eagles, others are Crows. The gods of things are merely another aspect of the things they govern.¹ This mythological classification is therefore just another form of those we described earlier. So we can be sure that this way of conceiving the world is independent of any ethnic or geographical particularity. At the same time, however, it seems clear that such a world view is closely tied to the whole system of totemic beliefs.

II

In the work to which we have already alluded several times, we showed how these facts illuminate the way humanity formed the

¹ This is particularly evident among the Haida. Swanton says that every animal has two aspects. On the one hand, it is an ordinary creature that can be hunted and eaten; but at the same time it is a supernatural being with the external form of an animal, and to which man is subject. The mythic beings that correspond to various cosmic phenomena have the same ambiguity (J. R. Swanton, *The Haida* (London: E. J. Brill, 1905), 14, 16, 25).

notion of genus or class. Indeed, these systematic classifications are the first that we encounter historically. We have just seen that they are modelled on social organization, or rather that they appropriate the framework of society as their own. The phratries function as genera and the clans as species. Because men formed groups, they were able to group things; they classified things simply by placing them in the groups they had already formed. And if these various classes of things were not simply juxtaposed to one another but ranked according to a unified plan, that is because the social groups they belong to are themselves interdependent, and through their union form an organic whole—the tribe. The unity of these first logical systems merely reproduces the unity of society. Thus we have an opportunity to verify the proposition we announced at the beginning of this work, and to assure ourselves that the fundamental notions of mind, the essential categories of thought, can be the product of social factors. The preceding demonstrates that this is in fact the case with the very notion of category.

We do not mean to deny, however, that individual consciousness, even falling back on its own resources, has the capacity to perceive resemblances between the particular things it conceives for itself. On the contrary, it is clear that even the most primitive and simplest classifications already presuppose this faculty. It is not accidental that the Australian places things in the same clan or in different clans. In him as in us, similar images attract, opposites repel, and he classifies things in one or another category according to his sense of these affinities and repulsions.

And we can see in some cases what has inspired him. In all likelihood the initial and fundamental frameworks of these classifications were composed of the two phratries and began as dichotomies. Now, when a classification has only two genera, these are almost necessarily conceived as antithetical. They are used initially as a means of neatly separating things that contrast most clearly. Some are put on the right, others on the left. The Australian classifications are of this sort. If the white cockatoo is classified in one phratry, the black cockatoo is in the other; if the sun is on one side, the moon and stars are on the other side. Very often, the beings that serve the two phratries as totems are opposite colours. Such oppositions are found even outside Australia. Where one of the phratries is responsible for peace, the other is responsible for war; if one has water as its totem,

the other has earth. This surely explains why the two phratries have often been regarded as naturally antagonistic. Granted, there is a kind of rivalry, even innate hostility between them. The opposition of things is extended to persons: the logical contrast is echoed as social conflict.

Within each phratry, on the other hand, things that seem to have the greatest affinity with the totem have been placed in the same clan. For example, the moon is placed with the black cockatoo; the sun, air, and wind with the white cockatoo. Another example: the totemic animal is grouped with its source of food, as well as with its closest allies. Of course, we cannot always understand the obscure psychology that presides over many of these affinities and distinctions. But the preceding examples suffice to demonstrate that a certain intuition of similarities and differences evident in things has played a role in creating these classifications.

But the feeling of similarities is one thing and the notion of genus another. Genus is the external framework whose contents include objects perceived as like one another. The contents cannot provide their own framework. They consist of *vague and shifting images*, the superimposition and partial fusion of a *fixed number of individual images* found to have common elements. By contrast, the framework is a *definite form* with firm boundaries that can be applied to an *indefinite number of things*, whether visible or not, whether actual or merely potential. Indeed, every genus has an extended scope that is infinitely greater than the circle of objects whose resemblance we have confirmed through direct experience. This is why a whole school of thinkers refuses, not without reason, to identify the idea of genus with that of generic image. The generic image is merely the residual representation that similar, somewhat overlapping representations leave in us when they are simultaneously present in consciousness. Genus, on the other hand, is a logical symbol that allows us to think clearly about these similarities and others like them. Moreover, the best proof of the gap that separates these two notions is that the animal is capable of forming generic images, whereas it lacks the art of thinking in terms of genera and species.

The idea of genus is a tool of thought that was obviously constructed by men. But to construct it we needed to have a model, for how could this idea have emerged if there were nothing within us or outside us to suggest it? The reply that it was given to us a priori is

not an adequate one; as they say, that lazy solution is the death of analysis. Now, it is hard to imagine where we would have found that indispensable model if not in the spectacle of collective life. A genus is indeed an ideal yet clearly defined grouping of things with internal bonds analogous to the bonds of kinship. And the only groupings of this kind that we know from experience are those that men form with one another. Material things can form mechanical collections, constellations, or mechanical assemblages with no internal unity, but not groups in the sense we have just defined. A heap of sand or a pile of stones is not comparable to the kind of defined and organized society that constitutes a genus. In all probability we would never have thought of joining elements of the universe together in homogeneous groups called genera if we had not had the example of human societies before our eyes, if we had not begun by making things themselves members of the society of men, so that human and logical groupings initially overlapped.¹

From another perspective, a classification is a system whose parts are ranked in a hierarchical order. There are both dominant and subordinate features; the species and their distinctive properties are subsumed under genera and their attributes, and different species of the same genus are imagined on the same level. Is comprehensiveness preferable? If this is so, then things are represented in an inverse order: the highest-ranking are the species that are most specific and richest in reality, the lowest-ranking types the most general and poorest in detail. Still, they are represented in a hierarchical order. And we must beware of thinking that this term has only a metaphorical meaning: the purpose of a classification is to establish relations of subordination and coordination, and man would never have thought to order his knowledge in this way if he had not already known what a hierarchy is. Neither the spectacle of physical nature nor the mechanism of mental associations could provide us with this idea. Hierarchy is strictly a social thing. Only in society are there

¹ One of the signs of this original lack of distinction is that, like the social divisions with which they were first merged, genera are sometimes assigned a territorial base. Thus, among the Wotjobaluk in Australia, and among the Zuni in America, things are thought of as distributed between the different regions of space, like the clans. And this regional distribution of things and that of clans coincide (see Durkheim and Mauss, 'De quelques formes primitives de classification', 34 ff.). Classifications preserve something of this spatial character even among relatively advanced peoples, for example in China (*ibid.* 55 ff.).

superiors, inferiors, and equals. As a result, even if the facts were not yet conclusive, the analysis of these notions would be sufficient to reveal their source. We have borrowed them from society and projected them onto our representation of the world. Society has provided the canvas on which logical thought has operated.

III

But these primitive classifications bear no less directly on the genesis of religious thought.

They imply, in fact, that all things classified in the same clan or in the same phratry are closely related to each other and to the being that serves as the totem of that clan or phratry. When the Australian of the Port Mackay tribe says that the sun, snakes, etc. belong to the Yungaroo phratry, he is not simply applying a common but purely conventional label to all those disparate beings; for him the word has an objective meaning. He truly believes that 'alligators *are* Yungaroo, that kangaroos are Wootaroo. The sun *is* Yungaroo, the moon Wootaroo and so on for the constellations, the trees, the plants, and so forth.'¹ An internal tie binds them to the group in which they are placed and hold full membership. They are said to belong to this group just as the human individuals do who are part of it, so a relationship of the same kind joins its human members. Man sees the things of his clan as comrades or kin; he calls them friends and considers them made from the same flesh as he. There are elective affinities and a special compatibility between them and himself. Things and men attract each other in some way, understand each other, and are naturally in harmony. For example, when a Wakelbura of the Mallera phratry is buried, the scaffold on which the body is exposed 'must be made of the wood of any tree belonging to the Mallera phratry'.² The same is true for the branches that cover the corpse. If the deceased is of the Banbe class, a Banbe tree must be used. In the same tribe, a magician can use in his art only things that belong to his phratry; because other things are foreign to him, he is unable to make them obey. A bond of mystic sympathy thus joins

¹ George Bridgmann, in Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, i. 91.

² A. W. Howitt, 'On Some Australian Beliefs', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 13 (1884), 191 n. 1.

each individual to the other beings associated with him, whether they are living or not. Hence the belief that what he will do or has done can be inferred from what they do. Again, among Wakelbura, when an individual dreams he has killed an animal belonging to a particular social division, he expects to meet a man from that division the next day. And conversely, things assigned to a clan or a phratry cannot be used against the members of that phratry or clan. Among the Wotjobaluk, every phratry has its own trees. To hunt an animal from the Gurogity phratry, a man can use only weapons made of wood taken from trees of the other phratry, and vice versa; otherwise the hunter is sure to miss his mark. The native is convinced that the arrow would be deflected from its target of its own accord and refuse, so to speak, to hit an animal that is friend and kin.

Thus, by their union, the people of the clan and the things classified within it form an interdependent system in which all parts are linked and vibrate sympathetically. This organization, which might at first seem to us purely logical, is at the same time a moral system. The same principle animates and unifies it: namely, the totem. Just as a man who belongs to the Crow clan has something of this animal in him, so the rain, belonging to the same clan and the same totem, is necessarily regarded as 'being the same thing as a crow'. For the same reason the moon is a black cockatoo, the sun a white cockatoo, every blackwood tree a pelican, and so forth. All beings classified in the same clan—men, animals, plants, inanimate objects—are only modalities of the totemic being. This is the meaning of the formula reported above, which makes them virtually the same species: all are really of the same flesh in the sense that they all participate in the nature of the totemic animal. [. . .]

Moreover, we know that the totemic animal is a sacred being. Therefore all things belonging to the clan for which it is emblematic share the same character; since they are in a sense animals of the same species, like man, they too are sacred. And the classifications that situate them in relation to other things in the universe simultaneously assign them a place in the religious system as a whole. That is why the animals or plants cannot be freely consumed by the human members of the clan. In the Mount Gambier tribe, the people whose totem is a *non-poisonous snake* must abstain not only from the flesh of this snake but also from seal meat, eels, and so on. If

they eat these things when driven by necessity, they must at least mitigate the sacrilege by performing expiatory rites, as if they were violating the totem itself. Among the Euahlayi, where use but not abuse of the totem is permitted, the same rule applies to other things that belong to the clan. Among the Arunta, the prohibition that protects the totemic animal extends even to animals associated with it; and in any case these animals deserve particular respect. The feelings inspired by both are identical.¹

But even more effective proof that all things attached to a totem share the same nature and consequently the same religious character is the fact that on occasion they play the same role. They are accessory or secondary totems, or, according to a well-established term, they are subtotems. Within a clan, smaller groups form under the influence of sympathies and personal affinities. These more limited associations tend to be relatively autonomous and form something like a new subdivision, a subclan within the primary clan. To be distinctive and unique, this subclan needs its own totem—hence a subtotem. Now, the totems of these secondary groups are chosen from among the various things classified under the principal totem. So they are virtual totems, literally, for the smallest circumstance is enough to make them actual totems. They have a latent totemic nature that becomes manifest when conditions permit or require. So the same individual may have two totems: a principal totem that is common to the whole clan, and a subtotem that is specific to the

¹ There are, however, certain tribes in Queensland in which the things assigned to a social group are not forbidden to the members of this group. This is the case with the Wakelbura, for instance. It should be recalled that in this society the matrimonial classes serve as frameworks for classification (see above, p. 110). Now, not only can the people of a class eat the animals attributed to that class, but they *cannot eat others*. All other food is prohibited (Howitt, *Native Tribes*, 113; Curr, *The Australian Race*, iii. 27).

However, we must not conclude that these animals are considered profane. It will be observed that the individual not only may but must eat them, since he is forbidden other nourishment. And this imperative character of the prescription is a sure sign that we are in the presence of things of a religious nature. But their religious aspect has given birth to a positive obligation, not to the negative obligation that is a prohibition. It may even be possible to see how this deviation might have happened. We have seen above (see p. 108) that every individual is assumed to have a kind of property right to his totem, and consequently to the things attached to it. Special circumstances influenced the development of this aspect of the totemic relationship, and people came quite naturally to believe that only the members of a clan could dispose of their totem and everything assimilated to it, and that others, by contrast, had no right to touch it. Under these conditions, a clan could feed itself only with things assigned to it.

subclan to which he belongs. These are somewhat analogous to the *nomen* and the *cognomen** of the Romans.

Sometimes we even see a subclan throw off the yoke and become an autonomous group, an independent clan. The subtotem then becomes a principal totem. [. . .] This transformation of the subtotem into a totem happens, moreover, imperceptibly, so that in certain cases the situation is ill defined, and it is hard to say whether one is dealing with a principal totem or a secondary one. [. . .] Thus the different things classified in a clan are like so many cores around which new totemic cults can form. This is the best evidence of the religious feelings they inspire. If they did not have a sacred nature, they could not so easily be promoted to the same level as those sacred things *par excellence*, the actual totems.

The circle of religious things, then, extends well beyond what seemed at first to be its boundaries. It includes not only the totemic animals and human members of the clan, but, since there is nothing known that is not classified* in a clan and under a totem, there is also nothing that does not receive some reflection of that religious nature. When actual gods make their appearance in later religions, each of them will be appointed to rule a particular category of natural phenomena, this one to the sea, that one to the air, another to the harvest or fruits, and so on, and each of these provinces of nature will be regarded as drawing its life from the presiding god. This parcelling out of nature among different divinities is precisely what constitutes the religious representation of the universe. As long as humanity has not gone beyond the phase of totemism, the various totems of the tribe play precisely the same role that will later be assigned to divine personalities. In the Mount Gambier tribe, which we have taken as a prime example, there are ten clans, and so the whole world is divided into ten classes, or rather into ten families, each of which has been founded by a particular totem. All things classified in a clan derive their reality from that founder, since they are conceived as different aspects of the totemic being: to return to our example, rain, thunder, lightning, clouds, hail, and winter are regarded as different kinds of crow. All together these ten families of things constitute a complete and systematic representation of the world; and that representation is religious since its principles are drawn from religious notions. Far from being confined to one or two categories of things, the domain of totemic religion extends to the limits of the known universe. Like

Greek religion, it situates the divine everywhere. The well-known formula πάντα πληρὴ θεῶν* can serve as its motto as well.

To conceive of totemism in this way, however, we must modify our long-standing notion on one fundamental point. Until the discoveries of recent years, totemism was thought to consist entirely of the cult of a particular totem and was defined as the religion of the clan. From this point of view, there seemed to be as many independent totemic religions in the same tribe as there were different clans. [. . .] But the reality is more complex. Of course, the cult of each totem has its seat in the corresponding clan; it is celebrated only there. Members of the clan are entrusted with it and transmit it from one generation to the next, along with the beliefs on which it is based. On the other hand, the different totemic cults practised within the same tribe do not develop in parallel, unaware of one another, as though each were a complete and self-sufficient religion. They are mutually implicated: they are merely parts of the same whole, elements of the same religion. The men of one clan do not regard the beliefs of neighbouring clans with the indifference, scepticism, or hostility usually inspired by a foreign religion; they themselves share these beliefs. [. . .] Moreover, this community of beliefs sometimes becomes manifest in the cult. In principle the rites that involve a totem can be performed only by the men of that totem, yet often representatives of different clans are present. And their role is not always that of simple spectators. Although they cannot officiate, they decorate those who perform and they prepare the service. [. . .] There is even a whole cycle of rites that must take place in the presence of the assembled tribe: these are the totemic ceremonies of initiation.

Furthermore, totemic organization as just described must clearly result from a sort of understanding among all the members of the tribe without distinction. Each clan cannot possibly have invented its beliefs independently of the others; the cults of different totems must in some way have adapted to one another since they are perfectly complementary. Indeed, as we have seen, the same totem is not usually repeated twice in the same tribe, and the whole universe was divided among the totems in such a way that the same object is not found in two different clans. Such a methodical division could not have been made without a tacit or considered agreement in which the whole tribe would have had to participate. The set of beliefs

generated in this way is therefore in part (but only in part) a tribal matter.

In sum: to form an adequate idea of totemism, we must not limit ourselves to the confines of the clan but consider the tribe as a whole. To be sure, each clan's particular cult enjoys great autonomy: we can foresee even now that the active ferment of religious life will be centred in the clan. On the other hand, all these cults are inter-related, and totemic religion is the complex system formed by their union, just as Greek polytheism was formed by the union of all the cults addressed to different divinities. We have just shown that, understood in this way, totemism, too, has its cosmology.

CHAPTER 4

CENTRAL TOTEMIC BELIEFS (Conclusion)

IV. THE INDIVIDUAL TOTEM AND THE SEXUAL TOTEM

IN the previous chapters, we have examined totemism as a public institution. The only totems at issue until now were the common property of a clan, a phratry, or, in a sense, a tribe; the individual figured in them only as a member of the group. But we know that there is no religion that does not have an individual aspect. This general observation applies to totemism. Alongside the impersonal and collective totems that are primary, there are others that belong to the individual, that express his personality, and whose cult he practises privately.

I

In some Australian tribes and in most of the Indian societies of North America, each individual maintains a personal relationship with a particular thing, which is comparable to the relationship each clan maintains with its totem. This thing is sometimes an inanimate being or man-made object, but it is usually an animal. In some cases, a circumscribed part of the body, such as the head, the feet, or the liver, serves the same function.

The name of the thing also serves as the name of the individual. This is his personal name, a first name that is added to the collective totem, as the *praenomen* of the Romans was added to the *nomen gentilicium*. True, this fact has been documented only in a certain number of societies, but it is probably widespread. Indeed, we will soon demonstrate that the thing and the individual share an identical nature, and this identical nature implies an identical name. Conferred during especially important religious ceremonies, this first name has a sacred character. It is not pronounced in the ordinary circumstances of profane life. The usual language that serves to designate the thing may even be somewhat modified for this special purpose. For the terms of everyday language are excluded from religious life. [. . .]

The individual and his animal namesake are closely bound together. The man participates in the animal's nature; he has its good qualities as well as its faults. For example, someone who has the eagle as a personal emblem is thought to possess the gift of seeing into the future; if he has the name bear, it is said that he is more likely to be wounded in combat because the bear is slow and heavy and easily trapped; if the animal is scorned, the man is subjected to the same scorn. The kinship of the two beings is so great that in certain circumstances, especially in case of danger, the man is thought capable of taking on the form of the animal. Conversely, the animal is regarded as the man's double, his alter ego. The association between them is so close that their destinies are often considered to be the same: nothing can happen to one without the other feeling the repercussions. If the animal dies, the life of the man is threatened. Hence the general rule that one must neither kill the animal nor, above all, eat its flesh. When applied to the clan totem, this prohibition involves all sorts of modifications and compromises, but here it is much more categorical and absolute.

As for the animal, it protects the man and functions as a kind of patron. It warns him of possible dangers and the means to escape them; it is said to be his friend. And since it is often thought to have magical powers, it transfers those powers to its human partner, who staunchly believes them to be a shield against bullets, arrows, and blows of all sorts. The individual's confidence in his protector is such that he braves the greatest dangers and accomplishes disconcerting acts of daring with a fearless serenity: faith gives him the courage and the necessary strength. None the less, the man's relationship to his patron is not one of pure and simple dependency. The individual, on his side, can act on the animal. He gives it orders and has a hold over it. A Kurnai whose friend and ally is the shark believes he can disperse the sharks threatening his boat by means of incantations. [. . .]

The totem is the patron of the clan, just as the individual's patron serves him as a personal totem. So it is desirable that our terminology reflect this kinship between the two systems. That is why, with Frazer, we will call the cult that each individual practises with regard to his patron *individual totemism*. This terminology is further justified by the fact that in certain cases, the primitive himself uses the same word to designate the clan totem and the individual's animal protector. [. . .]

However, despite the clear kinship of these two institutions, there are important differences between them. While the clan thinks of itself as issuing from the animal or plant that serves as its totem, the individual does not believe he has any such relationship with his personal totem. It is a friend, a partner, a protector, but not a relative. The man profits from the virtues his totem is thought to possess, but he is not of the same blood. In the second place, the members of a clan permit neighbouring clans to eat the animal whose name they bear collectively, provided the necessary formalities are observed. By contrast, not only does the individual respect the species to which his personal totem belongs but he is pledged to protect it against strangers, at least wherever the destinies of man and animal are thought to be connected.

But these two kinds of totems differ above all in the way they are acquired.

The collective totem is part of the legal status of each individual: it is generally hereditary. In any case, it is designated by birth and the will of men has nothing to do with it. Sometimes the child has his mother's totem (Kamilaroi, Dieri, Urabunna, etc.); sometimes his father's totem (Narrinyeri, Warramunga, etc.); and sometimes the totem that predominates where his mother has conceived (Arunta, Loritja). The individual totem, on the contrary, is acquired by a deliberate act and must be determined by whole series of ritual practices. The usual method among the American Indians is the following. Around the time of puberty, as the moment of initiation approaches, the young man withdraws to an isolated place—a forest, for example. There, during a period of time that varies from several days to several years, he undertakes all sorts of exhausting and unnatural exercises. He fasts, mortifies himself, inflicts various self-mutilations. Sometimes he wanders, shouting and screaming; sometimes he lies still, stretched out on the ground, groaning; sometimes he dances, prays, invokes his usual divinities. He ends by working himself into a state of intense overexcitement verging on delirium. When he reaches this moment of paroxysm, his ideas easily take on a hallucinatory quality. [. . .] Under these conditions, dreaming or awake, he sees, or thinks he sees (which amounts to the same thing), an animal that appears to him in an attitude that seems to show its friendly intentions, and he will imagine that he has discovered the patron he was waiting for.

This process, however, is rare in Australia. On that continent, the personal totem seems rather to be imposed by a third party either at birth or at the moment of initiation. Generally a relative plays this role, or a person invested with special powers, such as an old person or a magician. Sometimes divination is used. For example, in Charlotte Bay, at Cape Bedford, or on the Proserpine river, the grandmother or another old woman takes a small portion of the umbilical cord attached to the placenta and spins it around vigorously. During this time, other old women, seated in a circle, take turns proposing different names. The name adopted is the one pronounced at the moment the cord breaks. Among the Yaraikanna of Cape York, the young initiate is given a little water to rinse out his mouth after having his tooth pulled, and is then asked to spit into a bucket of water. The old men carefully examine the kind of clot formed by the blood and saliva, and the natural object it resembles becomes the young man's personal totem. [. .]

Not only is the individual totem acquired and not given, but its acquisition is not always compulsory. In Australia there are many tribes where this usage seems to be entirely unknown. [. .] And while individual totemism seems freer and more optional, it has much greater power to resist erosion than the totemism of the clan. One of Hill-Tout's chief informers was a baptized Salish; yet although he had sincerely abandoned all the beliefs of his ancestors and become a model catechist, his faith in the efficacy of personal totems remained unshakeable. Similarly, while no visible traces of collective totemism remain in civilized countries, the idea of solidarity between each individual and an animal, a plant, or some external object is the basis of customs still observable in several European countries.¹

II

Between collective totemism and individual totemism there is an intermediate form that draws on both: sexual totemism. It is encountered only in Australia in a small number of tribes. [. .]

¹ Thus, at the birth of a child, one plants a tree on which one lavishes reverent care; for one believes that its fate and that of the child are bound together. In his *Golden Bough*, Frazer reported a number of practices or beliefs that translate variants of the same idea (cf. Edwin Sidney Hartland, *Legend of Perseus* (London: D. Nutt, 1894-6), ii. 1-55).

Among these different peoples, all the men of the tribe, on the one hand, and all the women, on the other, form two distinct and even antagonistic societies, whatever their clan membership. Now, each of these sexual guilds believes it is joined by mystic bonds to a certain animal. Among the Kurnai, all the men regard themselves as brothers of the emu-wren (Yeerung), and all the women as sisters of the elegant linnet (Djeetgun); all the men are Yeerung and all the women Djeetgun. [. . .] Each sex sees the animal to which it is related as a protector that must be treated with the greatest regard: to kill or eat it is forbidden.

This animal protector plays the same role in relation to male and female society as the clan totem plays in relation to the clan. The expression 'sexual totemism', which we borrow from Frazer,¹ is therefore justified. This new kind of totem closely resembles the clan totem in the sense that it is also collective; it belongs indiscriminately to all individuals of the same sex. Similarly, it implies a relationship of descent and common bloodline between the animal patron and the corresponding sex. [. . .] But from another perspective, this same totem resembles the individual totem, for each member of the sexual group is thought to be personally bound to a particular individual of the corresponding animal species. The two lives are so closely linked that the death of the animal triggers that of a human. 'The life of a bat', say the Wotjobaluk, 'is the life of a man.' That is why each sex not only honours its totem but obliges members of the other sex to honour it as well. Any violation of this prohibition leads to actual bloody battles between men and women.

In sum, what is truly original about these totems is that in a sense they are tribal totems. Indeed, they derive from a conception of the whole tribe as the offspring of a mythic couple. Such a belief certainly seems to imply that tribal feeling is strong enough to prevail, to a certain degree, over the particularism of the clans. Most likely a distinct origin is assigned to men and women because the sexes live apart from one another.²

¹ J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1910), 51.

² On this point, see our study on 'La Prohibition de l'inceste et ses origines', 44 ff.

CHAPTER 5

THE ORIGINS OF THESE BELIEFS

I. A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE THEORIES

THE beliefs we have just reviewed are clearly religious in nature since they involve a classification of things as sacred and profane. To be sure, spiritual beings are not invoked here, and in the course of our discussion we have not even mentioned spirits, genies, or divine personalities. But if some writers (who will be mentioned again) have refused for this reason to see totemism as a religion, that is because they have constructed a mistaken notion of the religious phenomenon.

Furthermore, we are convinced that totemism is the most primitive religion that can be observed at present, perhaps the most primitive that ever existed. Indeed, totemism is inseparable from clan-based social organization. As we have shown, it can be defined strictly as a function of this organization, but it also seems clear that the kind of clan found in many Australian societies could not have existed without the totem. Members of the same clan are joined together neither by a common habitat nor by shared blood, since they are not necessarily blood relatives and are often dispersed throughout the tribal territory. Their unity comes solely from the fact that they have the same name and the same emblem, from the belief that they sustain the same relations with the same categories of things, that they practise the same rites, in short that they participate in the same totemic cult. Thus totemism and the clan, at least insofar as the clan is not merged with the local group, are interdependent.

Now, clan-based organization is the simplest we know. In fact, it exists with all its essential elements from the moment a society is made up of two primary clans. Therefore, no society is more rudimentary—since I believe no trace of a society consisting of a single clan has yet been found. A religion so closely allied with a social system of such surpassing simplicity can be considered the most elementary we know. If we manage to find the sources of the beliefs just analysed, we may discover at the same time the causes that spark humanity's religious feeling.

But before tackling the problem ourselves, it is fitting to examine the most authoritative solutions proposed thus far.

I

First, we find a group of scholars who thought they could explain totemism by deriving it directly from an earlier religion.

For Tylor¹ and Wilken,² totemism was a particular form of the ancestor cult; in their view, the widespread doctrine of the transmigration of souls served as the transition between these two religious systems. A great number of peoples believe that after death the soul does not remain eternally disembodied but reanimates another living body; furthermore, 'as the psychology of the inferior races establishes no clear-cut line of demarcation between the souls of men and those of animals, it has no trouble accepting the transmigration of the human soul into the bodies of animals'.³ Tylor cites a certain number of such cases. Under these conditions, the religious respect the ancestor inspires quite naturally devolves on the animal or plant with which it is henceforth merged. The animal that serves as the receptacle of a venerated being becomes a holy thing, the object of a cult—in short, a totem—for all the ancestor's descendants, for the clan.

The facts observed by Wilken in the societies of the Malay archipelago would tend to prove that this is indeed how totemic beliefs arose there. In Java and Sumatra, crocodiles are particularly honoured. They are seen as benevolent protectors whom it is forbidden to kill; offerings are made to them. And the cult that is rendered to them stems from the belief that they incarnate the souls of ancestors. [. .]

But the societies from which these facts are gleaned have already reached a rather high level of culture; in any case, they have gone beyond the phase of pure totemism. They are organized into families, not totemic clans. Most of the animals to which religious

¹ Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1873), i. 402, ii. 237, and 'Remarks on Totemism, with Special Reference to some Modern Theories Respecting it', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 28 and NS I: 138.

² Albertus Christian Kruijt Wilken, *Het Animisme bij den Volks van den indischen Archipel* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1906), 69–75.

³ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, ii. 6.

homage is paid are worshipped not by specific family groups but by entire tribes. Therefore, even if these beliefs and practices are related to ancient totemic cults, they now represent them in altered forms and are unlikely to reveal the sources of those cults. We cannot understand how an institution was formed by considering it at its moment of decline. If we want to know how totemism arose, it must be observed neither in Java, nor in Sumatra or Melanesia, but in Australia. And here there is no cult of the dead nor any doctrine of transmigration. [. . .] It is true that the first ancestors are often represented in animal form, and this common representation is an important fact that we must take into consideration; but it cannot have arisen from the belief in metempsychosis* since this belief is unknown in Australian societies.

Moreover, far from explaining totemism, this belief presupposes one of its fundamental principles; that is, it assumes the very thing it is meant to explain. Like totemism, in effect, it implies that man is conceived as closely akin to the animal, for if these two realms were clearly distinguished in people's minds, they would not believe that the human soul could pass so easily from one to the other. Similarly, the body of the animal must be considered its true homeland, since it is supposed to take refuge there the moment it has its freedom. Now, if the doctrine of transmigration postulates this singular affinity, it does not in any way explain it. The only explanation Tylor offers is that sometimes man calls to mind certain features of the anatomy and psychology of the animal. [. . .] But if he sees himself in these resemblances, they are vague and exceptional. Above all man resembles his relatives and his companions, not plants or animals. [. . .]

Indeed, this entire theory rests on a fundamental misconception. For Tylor as for Wundt,* totemism is merely a particular case of animal worship. We know that, on the contrary, it must be seen as something quite different from a sort of zoolatry. The animal is not worshipped: far from being subject to it like a worshipper to his god, man is nearly the animal's equal and sometimes even uses it as his property. If the animals of the totemic species truly passed for the incarnations of ancestors, the members of strange clans would not be allowed to eat their flesh freely. In reality, the cult is addressed not to the animal as such but to the emblem, to the image of the totem. And there is no connection between this religion of the emblem and ancestor worship.

While Tylor relates totemism to ancestor worship, Jevons connects it to the cult of nature,¹ and this is how he does it. Shaken by the irregularity of natural phenomena, man had populated the world with supernatural beings. Next, he felt the need to come to terms with the daunting forces that now surrounded him. He understood that the best way to avoid being crushed by them was to ally himself with some and ensure their cooperation. Now, in this phase of history, no form of alliance and association was known but that of kinship. All the members of the same clan help each other because they are relatives or, what amounts to the same thing, because they regard each other as such; by contrast, different clans treat each other as enemies because they are of different blood. So the only way to enlist the support of supernatural beings was to adopt them as relatives and have oneself adopted by them: the well-known process of *blood-covenant** easily achieved this result. But since the individual at this moment in history did not yet have his own personality and was seen only as part of his group or clan, it was the clan as a whole and not the individual that collectively contracted this kinship. For the same reason this kinship was contracted not with a particular object but with the natural group, or species, of which this object was part. For man thinks of the world as he thinks of himself, and just as he did not conceive of himself as separate from his clan, he could not conceive of a thing as separate from its species. Now, a species of things joined to a clan by bonds of kinship is, says Jevons, a totem.

Indeed, totemism certainly does imply a close association between a clan and a particular category of objects. But Jevons's notion—that this association was deliberately contracted, in full awareness of an ultimate goal—does not seem to accord with what history teaches us. Religions are too complicated, they fulfil too many obscure needs, to have their source in a self-consciously wilful act. Furthermore, even as it is excessively simplistic, this hypothesis is full of improbabilities. Man is said to have tried to ensure the cooperation of the supernatural beings on which things depend. But then he ought to have addressed himself to the most powerful among them, to those whose protection would be most effective. Instead, the beings with

¹ Frank Byron Jevons, *An Introduction to the History of Religion* (London: Methuen, 1902), 96 ff.

which he entered into this mystic kinship are most often the humblest. Moreover, if it were truly a matter of seeking allies and defenders, he should have appealed to as many as possible, for one can never have too much protection. In reality, however, each clan is routinely content with a single totem, that is, with a single protector, leaving the other clans to enjoy their own. Every group encloses itself strictly within its own religious domain, never trying to encroach on its neighbours'. According to the hypothesis under examination, such restraint and moderation are incomprehensible.

II

All these theories, moreover, wrongly omit one question that is central to the whole issue. We have seen that there are two kinds of totemism, that of the individual and that of the clan. These forms of totemism are so clearly linked, they cannot be unrelated. There is good reason to wonder whether one is not derived from the other, and, if so, which is primary; depending on the solution, the problem of the origins of totemism will be posed in different terms. Moreover, this question is of general interest. Individual totemism is the individual aspect of the totemic cult. If it is primary, it will have to be said that religion is born in the consciousness of the individual, that it answers above all to individual aspirations, and that it takes a collective form only secondarily.

The simplistic mentality that all too often inspires ethnographers and sociologists even now naturally inclines a number of scholars, in this case as in others, to explain the complex by the simple, the totem of the group by that of the individual. This is indeed the theory articulated by Frazer in his *Golden Bough*, by Hill-Tout, by Miss Fletcher, by Boas, and by Swanton. Moreover, it has the advantage of being in accord with the current conception of religion, which is rather generally seen as something quite private and personal. From this perspective, the clan totem can be only an individual totem generalized. After testing the value of a totem he freely chose, a prominent man would transmit it to his descendants. And they, multiplying over time, would eventually form that extended family we call the clan, and so the totem would have become collective. [. . .]

But where does individual totemism come from? The answer to this question varies according to the author.

Hill-Tout sees it as a particular case of fetishism.* Feeling surrounded on all sides by daunting spirits, the individual must have experienced the need that Jevons soon ascribed to the clan: to survive, he sought the reassurance of some powerful protector in this mysterious world. Thus the practice of the personal totem was established. For Frazer, this institution is simply a pretext, a strategy of war invented by men to escape certain dangers. We know that according to a widespread belief in many lower societies, the human soul can easily slip out of the body it inhabits; it may be far away but it continues to animate that body by a sort of long-distance action. But at certain critical moments, when life seems particularly threatening, it can be an advantage to withdraw the soul from the body and deposit it in a place or an object where it would be safer. And indeed, there are certain practices meant to extract the soul to shield it from some real or imaginary peril. For example, when people are about to enter a newly built house, a magician extracts their souls and puts them in a sack, to be restored to their owners once the threshold is crossed. The moment one enters a new house is particularly critical; there is a risk of disturbing and so offending the spirits that live in the ground, especially beneath the threshold, and if no precautions were taken these spirits would make a man pay dearly for his boldness. But once the danger is past, once their anger has been forestalled and their support assured thanks to the completion of certain rites, the souls can safely return to their usual place. Hill-Tout thinks this same belief must have given birth to the individual totem. In order to protect themselves from magic spells, men may have thought it wise to hide their souls in the anonymous crowd of an animal or plant species. But once this involvement was established, each individual found himself closely joined to the animal or plant in which his life force was supposed to reside. Two beings so closely allied were then considered nearly indistinguishable: they were thought to participate in one another's nature. Once permitted, this belief facilitated and activated the transformation of the personal totem into a hereditary, and subsequently collective, totem. For all the evidence indicates that this natural kinship had to be transmitted through heredity, from father to children.

We will not pause for a lengthy discussion of these two explanations of individual totemism: they are ingenious mental constructs but lack any positive proof. To reduce totemism to fetishism, it

would have to be established that fetishism comes first. Now, not only is there no evidence cited to prove this hypothesis, but it is contradicted by everything we know. The haphazard collection of rites called fetishism seems to appear only among peoples who have already reached a certain degree of civilization; such a cult is unknown in Australia. [. . .]

As for Frazer's theory, it assumes a kind of basic absurdity in the primitive which the known facts would deny. He has a logic, strange as it may sometimes seem to us; and unless he entirely lacked such logic, he would not be capable of the reasoning ascribed to him. Nothing could be more natural than his attempt to ensure the survival of his soul by concealing it in a secret and inaccessible place, as so many heroes of myth and legend are supposed to have done. But how could he have imagined it safer in the body of an animal than in his own? Of course it could more easily escape the spells of a magician by being lost in the species, but at the same time it would be prey to hunters. Hiding the soul in a material form exposed to danger on all sides is an odd kind of protection. Above all, it is inconceivable that whole peoples could have allowed themselves to subscribe to a similar aberration. Indeed, in a great many cases, the function of the individual totem is clearly very different from the one Frazer ascribes to it: it is first and foremost a means of conferring extraordinary powers on magicians, hunters, and warriors. As for the solidarity of man and thing, with all the attendant inconveniences, this is accepted as an unavoidable consequence of the rite but is not desired in itself and for itself.

We shall not pursue this controversy since it is not really the problem. The most crucial thing is to discover whether the individual totem is really the primary fact from which the collective totem derives. Depending on our answer to this question, we will have to look for the source of religious life in two opposite directions.

Now, there is such a convergence of decisive facts arguing against the hypothesis of Hill-Tout, Miss Fletcher, Boas, and Frazer that it is surprising it could be so readily and generally accepted.

First, we know that man often has a pressing interest not only in respecting his animal companions of the species that serves as his personal totem, but also in making sure that it is respected by his fellow men: this is a matter of life and death. If collective totemism were only a generalized form of individual totemism, it should rest

on the same principle. Not only should clan members abstain from killing and eating their animal totem, but they ought to do all they can to impose the same prohibition on others. In fact, far from imposing this renunciation on the whole tribe, each clan, by means of rites that we shall describe below, watches over the plant or animal whose name it bears so that it may increase and multiply, ensuring other clans abundant food. At the very least it should be admitted that in becoming collective, individual totemism was profoundly transformed, and this transformation should be accounted for.

Second, how can this hypothesis explain the fact that, except where totemism is in decline, two clans of the same tribe always have different totems? Two or more members of the same tribe, kin or not, should have no difficulty choosing the same animal as their personal totem and transmitting it to their descendants. Today two distinct families might easily have the same name. The strictly regimented way that totems and subtotems are divided, first between the two phratries, then between the various clans of each phratry, clearly presupposes a social understanding, a collective organization. That is, totemism is something other than an individual practice that was spontaneously generalized. [. . .]

If individual totemism was the primary fact, it ought to be all the more developed and all the more evident in more primitive societies. Conversely, it should be seen to lose ground and diminish among more advanced peoples. But the opposite is the truth of the matter. The Australian tribes lag far behind those of North America, yet Australia is the region with a predilection for collective totemism. *In the great majority of tribes, it alone prevails, while there is not one, to our knowledge, in which individual totemism is the sole practice.* Individual totemism is found in its characteristic form only in a tiny number of tribes. And where it is encountered, it is most often in only a rudimentary state, consisting of individual and optional practices limited in scope. Only magicians know the art of entering into mystic relations with animal species to which they are not naturally related. Ordinary people do not enjoy this privilege. In America, by contrast, the collective totem is in complete decline; in the societies of the north-west in particular it has only a rather diminished religious character. Conversely, among these peoples the individual totem plays a considerable role. Great efficacy is attributed to it, and it has become virtually a public institution. Thus it is characteristic of a

more advanced civilization. This undoubtedly explains the inversion of these two forms of totemism that Hill-Tout thought he observed among the Salish. Where collective totemism is fully developed, individual totemism is almost completely missing not because it has given way to the collective variety but, on the contrary, because the conditions necessary to its existence have not fully developed.

But it is even clearer that individual totemism, far from giving rise to clan totemism, presupposes it. It arose and continues to operate within the framework of collective totemism, and is an integral part of it. In fact, in the very societies where it is prevalent, novices do not have the right to take just any animal as a personal totem; each clan is allowed to choose among a certain number of specific species. In return, those belonging to the clan are its exclusive property; members of a strange clan cannot usurp them. Each individual is thought to sustain close bonds of dependence with the animal that serves as the totem to the entire clan. There are even cases where these bonds are perceptible: the individual totem represents one part or one particular aspect of the collective totem. Among the Wotjobaluk, each member of the clan considers the personal totems of his companions as to some extent his own; these are probably subtotems. And the subtotem presupposes the totem, just as the species presupposes the genus. Thus the primary form of individual religion we encounter in history seems to us not the active principle of public religion but, on the contrary, a simple aspect of that public religion.* The cult the individual organizes for himself, and to some extent for his private use, is hardly the germ of the collective cult but merely the collective cult adapted to the personal needs of the individual.

III

In a more recent work¹ inspired by the works of Spencer and Gillen, Frazer has tried to substitute a new explanation of totemism for the

¹ James George Frazer, 'The Beginnings of Religion and Totemism among the Australian Aborigines', *Fortnightly Review*, NS 68 (July 1905), 162 ff.; (Sept. 1905), 452. Cf. by the same author 'The Origin of Totemism', *Fortnightly Review* (April 1899), 648; (May 1899), 835. These last, somewhat older articles differ on one point from the earlier ones, but the basic theory is essentially no different. Both are reproduced in *Totemism*, i. 89-172. See in the same vein B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, 'Some Remarks on Totemism as Applied to Australian Tribes', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 28 (1899), 275-80, and Frazer's comments on the same subject, *Totemism*, i. 281-6.

one he had first proposed and we have just discussed. It rests on the postulate that the totemism of the Arunta is the most primitive we know; Frazer even goes so far as to say that it hardly differs from the true and absolutely original type.

What is noteworthy about this explanation is that the totems are attached neither to persons nor to groups of specific persons but to localities. In effect, each totem has its centre in a definite place. This is supposed to be where, at the beginnings of time, the souls of the first ancestors who formed the totemic group had their preferred residence. This is the sanctuary where the *churingas* are kept and where the cult is celebrated. This geographical distribution of the totems also determines the way the clans are recruited. The child's totem is not that of his father or mother but the totem central to the place where his mother felt the first symptoms of her pregnancy. It is said that the Arunta does not know the precise connection between generation and the sexual act. He believes that all conception is due to a kind of mystic fertilization. According to Frazer, this implies that a soul of some ancestor has penetrated the body of a woman and become the principle of a new life. So when the woman feels the child's first stirrings, she imagines that she has just been entered by one of the souls residing in this place. And since the child born afterward is the reincarnation of this ancestor, he necessarily has the same totem; that is, his clan is determined by the locality where he is believed to be mystically conceived.

Now, this local totemism would then represent the original form of totemism, which merely carried it a step further. This is how Frazer explains its origins.

At the precise moment when the woman feels she is pregnant, she must imagine that the spirit entering her has come from the surrounding objects, especially from one of them that has attracted her attention. [. . .] If she has recently eaten emu meat or yams, she will be convinced that an emu or a yam is gestating and developing inside her. Under these conditions, it is understandable that the child in turn is considered a kind of yam or emu, that he regards himself as an animal or plant of the same species, that he treats them with sympathy and respect, that he is forbidden to eat them, etc. From then on, totemism as we know it exists. Since its source is in the native's notion of conception, Frazer calls primitive totemism *conceptional*. [. . .]

But this theory, like Tylor's, begs the question. To imagine that human souls are the souls of animals or plants, one would already have to believe that man takes what is most essential in him from either the animal or the plant world. Now this belief is indeed at the basis of totemism. To pose it as self-evident is to assume what must be explained.

Moreover, the religious character of the totem is entirely incomprehensible from this point of view. For the vague belief in an obscure kinship of man and animal is not enough to establish a cult. This merging of distinct realms could not lead to dividing the world into sacred and profane. It is true that Frazer consistently refuses to see totemism as a religion, under the pretext that it contains no spiritual beings, prayers, invocations, offerings, and so on. According to him, it is only a magical system, by which he means a kind of crude and mistaken science, a first effort at discovering the laws of things. But we know that this is an inaccurate notion of religion and magic. There is religion when the sacred is distinguished from the profane, and we have seen that totemism is a vast system of sacred things. To explain it is therefore to discover how these things came to be considered sacred.¹ Frazer does not even pose this problem.

But what has overthrown this system is that its underlying postulate is untenable today. Frazer's entire argument presupposes that the local totemism of the Arunta is the most primitive we know, and that it is appreciably older than hereditary totemism, whether patrilineal or matrilineal. Now, according to the facts made available by Spencer and Gillen, we have been able to conjecture that there must have been a moment in the history of the Arunta people when totems, instead of being attached to particular places, were transmitted by heredity from mother to child.² This conjecture is definitively proved by new facts discovered by Strehlow³ that merely confirm the earlier observations of Schulze.⁴ In fact, these two authors teach us that even now, each Arunta, in addition to his local totem, has

¹ While seeing totemism as nothing but a system of magic, Frazer sometimes finds in it the first germs of a proper religion ('The Beginnings', 163). On the way he thinks religion arose from magic, see *The Golden Bough*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1890), i. 75-8 n. 2.

² 'Sur le totémisme', *L'Année sociologique*, 5 (1902), 82-121.

³ Strehlow, *Aranda*, ii. 57-8.

⁴ Revd Louis Schulze, 'The Aborigines of the Upper and Middle Finke River', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, 16 (1891), 238-9.

another that is independent of any geographical condition but belongs to him by birthright: his mother's totem. This second totem, like the first, is considered by the natives to be a powerful friend and protector that provides their food and averts possible dangers, and so on. [. . .] So it is certain that, among the Arunta, hereditary totemism through the maternal line does not come after local totemism but, on the contrary, must have preceded it. Today the maternal totem has only an accessory and complementary role; it is a second totem, and this explains how it could have escaped observers as attentive and experienced as Spencer and Gillen. But for it to remain on the second level, doing double duty with the local totem, there must have been a time when it held the primary place in religious life. It is to some extent a totem on the wane, but one that recalls a time when the totemic organization of the Arunta was very different from what it is today. Frazer's entire construct is thus undermined.

IV

Although Andrew Lang vigorously debated this theory of Frazer's, the one he proposes in his recent works¹ matches it on more than one point. In fact, like Frazer he sees all of totemism as the belief in a kind of consubstantiality of man and animal. But he explains it differently.

He derives it entirely from the fact that the totem is a name. From the time that human groups were constituted, each experienced the need to distinguish itself from neighbouring groups with whom it was connected, and to this end gave them different names. These names were borrowed preferably from the surrounding flora and fauna because plants and animals can easily be designated by gestures represented in drawings. The way men might resemble one of these objects determined the way the collective nominations were distributed between the groups.

Now, it is a well-known fact that 'for primitive minds, names and the things designated by these names are joined in a mystic and transcendental relationship'.² For example, the name an individual

¹ Andrew Lang, *Social Origins* (London: Longmans, 1903), particularly ch. 8, 'The Origin of Totem Names and Beliefs', and *The Secret of the Totem* (London: Longmans, 1905).

² Lang, *The Secret of the Totem* 121; cf. 116, 117.

bears is not considered simply a word or a conventional sign but an essential part of the individual himself. When it is the name of an animal, the man who bears it necessarily believes that he himself possesses this animal's most characteristic features. This belief gained credence as the historic origins of these nominations became more remote and were gradually effaced from memory. Myths were created to make this strange ambiguity of human nature more comprehensible. To explain it, people thought of the animal as the ancestor of the man, or of both as descendants of a common ancestor. Kinship bonds uniting each clan with the species of things whose name it bears were thus conceived. And once the origins of this fabulous kinship are explained, it seems to Andrew Lang that totemism is no longer a mystery.

But what is the source of the religious character of totemic beliefs and practices? Man's belief that he is an animal of a particular species does not explain why he attributes marvellous powers to this species, or indeed why he celebrates a cult dedicated to images that symbolize this animal. To this question Lang offers the same reply as Frazer: he denies that totemism is a religion. 'I find in Australia', he says, 'no example of religious practices such as praying to, feeding, or burying the totem.' Only at a later stage and after it was organized was totemism drawn to and absorbed by a system of properly religious ideas. According to an observation by Howitt,² when the natives attempt to explain totemic institutions, they attribute them neither to the totems themselves nor to man but to some supernatural being, such as Bunjil or Baiame. 'If', says Lang, 'we accept this testimony, one source of the religious character of totemism stands revealed to us. Totemism obeys the decrees of Bunjil, as the Cretans obeyed the decrees of Zeus in Minoan civilization.' Now according to Lang, the notion of these higher divinities was formed outside the totemic system; therefore this system was not a religion in itself but took on a tinge of religiosity only through contact with a true religion.

But these very myths run counter to Lang's conception of totemism. If the Australians had seen the totem as merely something

¹ *The Secret of the Totem*, 136.

² A. W. Howitt, 'Further Notes on the Australian Class Systems', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 18 (1889), 53-4. Cf. *Native Tribes*, 89, 488, 498.

human and profane, they would not have thought to turn it into a divine institution. If, on the other hand, they felt the need to connect the totem to a divinity, they did so because they recognized its sacred character. These mythological interpretations express the religious nature of totemism, but they do not explain it. [. . .]

V

We have reviewed the prevailing explanations of totemic beliefs, giving each its due. But now that this examination is complete, we can observe that all are subject to the same criticism.

If we take these formulations literally, they seem to fall into two categories. Some (Frazer and Lang) deny the religious character of totemism, which amounts to denying the facts. Others recognize the religious character but believe they can derive it from an earlier religion. In reality, this distinction is more apparent than real, the first category being contained within the second. [. . .]

We know that totemism is closely linked to the most primitive social organization that is known and, in all likelihood, conceivable. To assume that it was preceded by another religion different only in degree is to depart from the evidence of observation and enter the realm of arbitrary and unverifiable conjecture. If we want to remain consistent with the results previously obtained, we must continue to affirm the religious nature of totemism and at the same time refrain from reducing it to a different religion. Not that there can be any question of attributing its causes to non-religious ideas. But among the representations that play a part in its origin, some may in themselves invoke its religious character, and do so directly. These are the representations we must look for.

CHAPTER 6

THE ORIGINS OF THESE BELIEFS (Continued)

II. THE NOTION OF THE TOTEMIC PRINCIPLE OR *MANA*, AND THE IDEA OF FORCE

SINCE individual totemism is more recent than clan totemism and even seems to be derived from it, clan totemism should be considered first. Before going on, however, since our analysis has revealed a multiplicity of seemingly disparate beliefs, we need to account for its internal coherence.

I

We have seen that drawn representations of the totem rank first among the things totemism finds sacred; then come the animals or plants whose name the clan bears; and finally the members of the clan. Since all these things are by rights sacred, if unequally so, their religious character does not derive from any particular distinguishing features. If a certain animal or plant species is the object of reverential fear, this is not because of its specific properties. Human members of the clan enjoy the same privilege, though to a somewhat lesser degree, and the simple image of this plant or animal inspires even more profound respect. Such similar feelings awakened by these dissimilar things in the consciousness of the faithful, constituting their sacred nature, can clearly derive only from a principle that is common to them all—the totemic emblems, the people of the clan, and the individuals of the totemic species. This is the common principle to which the cult is in reality addressed. In other words, totemism is the religion not of certain animals, men, or images, but of a kind of anonymous and impersonal force that is found in each of these beings though identical with none. None possesses it entirely and all share in it. This force is so independent of the particular subjects embodying it that it both pre-exists and survives them. Individuals die; generations pass away and are replaced by others; but this force remains ever present, living, and unchanged. It animates generations today just as it animated those of the past and will

animate those to come. Broadly speaking, we might say that it is the god worshipped by every totemic cult. Only it is an impersonal god, without a name, without a history, immanent in the world, diffused throughout a multitude of things.

And yet we have only a very imperfect idea of the real ubiquity of this semi-divine entity. It pervades not only every totemic species, every clan, and all objects that symbolize the totem; the scope of its action is even greater. Indeed, we have seen that beyond those eminently holy things, all things attributed to the clan as belonging to the principal totem have some sacred aspect. Since some are protected by prohibitions and others serve fixed functions in the ceremonies of the cult, they too are religious to some degree. This religious aspect is not inherently different from the religious aspect of the totem, and necessarily derives from the same principle. So the totemic god—to use the metaphor we have just adopted—is in them, just as it is in the totemic species and in the people of the clan. Since it is the soul of such different beings, we can see how it differs from those beings in whom it resides.

But the Australian does not conceive of this impersonal force abstractly. Influenced by causes we must investigate, he has been led to conceive of it as a kind of animal or plant, in short, as a tangible thing. This is the totem's real essence: it is merely the material form in which that immaterial substance is represented; diffused through all sorts of heterogeneous beings, this energy alone is the true subject of the cult. We are now in a better position to understand what the native means when he claims that the people of the Crow phratry, for example, are crows. He does not exactly mean that they are crows in the ordinary, empirical sense of the word, but that the same principle is essential to all of them and shared with the animals of the same name conceived in the outward form of the crow. So the universe, as totemism conceives it, is permeated and animated by a number of forces conceived by the imagination as figures borrowed, with few exceptions, from the plant or animal world. There are as many of these forces as there are clans in the tribe, and each of them circulates through certain categories of things as their essence and life principle.

When we say that these principles are forces, we are not using the word in a metaphorical way: they behave like real forces.* In a sense, they are even material forces that mechanically generate physical

effects. If an individual comes into contact with them without taking the necessary precautions, he receives a shock that can be compared to an electric charge. Sometimes they are conceived as fluids that escape through the extremities. When they enter a body that is not suited to receive them, they automatically cause sickness and death. Outside of man they play the role of life principle; by acting on them, as we shall see, the reproduction of the species is ensured. All life depends on them.

But in addition to their physical aspect, they also have a moral character. When the native is asked why he observes his rites, he answers that the ancestors always observed them, and that he must follow their example. Therefore, he behaves in a particular way with totemic beings, not only because the forces that reside in those beings are physically formidable, but because he feels morally obliged to behave this way; he feels that he is obeying a kind of imperative, that he is doing his duty. He not only fears sacred beings but respects them as well. Moreover, the totem is the source of the clan's moral life. All the beings that share the same totemic principle thereby regard themselves as morally bound to one another; they have definite obligations of assistance, vengeance, and so on, and these duties constitute kinship. Therefore the totemic principle is at once a physical force and a moral power; and we shall see that it is easily transformed into a divinity proper.

None of this is exclusive to totemism. Even in the most advanced religions, every god has preserved something of this ambiguity and fulfils both cosmic and moral functions. In addition to being a spiritual discipline, every religion is a kind of practice that allows man to face the world with more confidence. Even for the Christian, God the Father is the guardian of physical order as well as the legislator and judge of human conduct.

II

This interpretation of totemism may appear to attribute to the primitive ideas that are beyond his mental capacity. And of course we are not in a position to know whether he imagines these forces with the relative clarity our analysis requires. We can suggest that this notion is implied by his beliefs and dominates them; but we could not say to what extent it is expressly conscious or, on the contrary,

merely implicit and vaguely felt. There is no way to gauge more precisely the degree of clarity an idea like this can have in these minds that remain obscure to us. In any case, we find in the kinship societies of the Australian tribes, and even in the tribes themselves, explicit conceptions that differ from these ideas only in nuance and degree—confirmation of our conclusion and proof that our idea of totemism is not beyond the primitive mind.

The indigenous religions of Samoa have certainly transcended the totemic phase. In them we find real gods with proper names, and to a certain degree personal traits. However, traces of totemism cannot be denied. In fact, each god is attached to a territorial or family group, just as the clan totem is. Now, each of these gods is conceived as immanent in a specific animal species. It does not inhabit a particular subject but is in all of them at once, diffused throughout the entire species. [. . .] Thus it has all the features of the totemic principle, but one the imagination has clad in somewhat personal forms. Moreover, we should not exaggerate the personal quality, since it is incompatible with diffusion and ubiquity. If its contours were clearly defined it would not be dispersed in this way throughout a multitude of things.

In this case, though, the notion of an impersonal religious force is unquestionably beginning to change. In other cases, however, it is maintained in its abstract purity and achieves a much greater degree of generality than in Australia. Although the different totemic principles to which the various clans of the same tribe address themselves are distinct from one another, they are basically comparable, for they all play the same role in their respective spheres. Now, there are societies that have sensed this shared nature and then advanced to the notion of a unique religious force that binds the universe; all other sacred principles are merely modalities of this force. And since these societies are still thoroughly permeated by totemism, and bound to a social organization identical to that of the Australian peoples, totemism may be said to have carried this idea in its womb.

This can be observed among many American tribes, notably those belonging to the great family of the Sioux: Omaha, Ponka, Kansas, Osage, Assiniboine, Dakota, Iowa, Winnebago, Mandan, Hidatsa, and so on. [. . .] Especially in the particular gods they worship there is a pre-eminent power from which other forms seem to derive and which they call *wakan*. Due to the eminence assigned to this

principle in the Sioux pantheon, it has sometimes been seen as a kind of sovereign god, a Jupiter or Yahweh, and travellers have often translated *wakan* as 'great spirit'. This was a serious misunderstanding of its true nature. The *wakan* is not in the least a personal being: the natives do not represent it in fixed forms. [. . .] It is imagined as the wind, as a breath that originates at the four points of the compass and moves everything; it is the voice of rolling thunder; the sun, the moon, the stars are *wakan*. But enumeration cannot exhaust this infinitely complex notion. It is not a definite or definable power, the power of creating this or that; it is Power in the absolute sense, without epithet or qualification of any sort. The various divine powers are merely its particular manifestations and personifications; each of them is this power seen under one of its many aspects. [. . .]

We find the same notion among the Iroquois, whose social organization has an even more pronounced totemic character: the word *orenda* is the exact equivalent of the Sioux's *wakan*. [. . .] A sorcerer or shaman has *orenda*, but so does a man who succeeds in his affairs. Basically, everything in the world has its share of *orenda*; only the shares are unequal. Some beings, men, and things are privileged, others are relatively disadvantaged, and all of life consists of the conflicts between these *orendas* of unequal intensity. [. . .]

Among certain Melanesian peoples we find something called *mana*, a notion that is the exact equivalent of the Sioux *wakan* and the Iroquois *orenda*. Here is Codrington's definition of it:

The Melanesians believe in the existence of a force absolutely distinct from any material force, that works in all sorts of ways, for good or evil, and that it is in man's best interest to take in hand and control: That force is *mana*. I believe I understand the meaning this term has for the natives . . . It is a force, a nonmaterial and, in a sense, supernatural influence; but it reveals itself by physical force, or else by any kind of power and superiority man possesses. Mana is by no means fixed on a definite object; it can be carried by any sort of thing . . . The religion of the Melanesian consists in procuring mana for himself, for his own benefit or for someone else's.¹

This seems to be the same notion of an anonymous and diffuse force whose seed we have just discovered in Australian totemism. It has the same impersonality, and, as Codrington reminds us, we must

¹ R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), 118 n. 1.

guard against seeing it as a kind of supreme being; such an idea 'is absolutely alien' to Melanesian thought. *Mana* has the same ubiquity: it is nowhere in particular and everywhere at once. All forms of life, all effective actions—of men or living beings or simple minerals—are attributed to its influence.¹

Therefore it is not too bold to ascribe to Australian societies an idea like the one we have drawn from the analysis of totemic beliefs. This same idea is found, at a higher level of abstraction and generality, in religions rooted in the Australian system and visibly marked by it. The two conceptions are clearly related and differ only in degree. While *mana* is diffused throughout the entire universe, what we have called god, or, more precisely, the totemic principle, is located in an extended but none the less limited circle of beings and things of different kinds. It is *mana*, but a somewhat more specialized *mana*, although this specialization is only relative. [. . .]

Moreover, we can explain why the idea of *mana* could not reach the level of abstraction and generality in Australia that it attained in more advanced societies. It was not only the Australian's lack of aptitude for abstraction and generalization but the nature of the social setting that imposed this particularism. In fact, while totemism remains the basis of cultic organization, the clan preserves an autonomy within religious society that, although not absolute, is very pronounced. Of course, it can be said that in a sense each totemic group is merely one denomination of the tribal Church; but it is a denomination that enjoys broad independence. Although the cult celebrated within the clan is not self-sufficient, its relations with others are merely external. They stand side by side but do not intermingle. A clan's totem is wholly sacred only for that clan. As a result, the group of things held sacred in each clan, and which belong to it just as men do, has the same individuality and the same autonomy. Each is conceived as irreducible to similar groups and discontinuous with them, constituting a distinct realm. Under such conditions, it was unthinkable that these heterogeneous worlds were only varied manifestations of a single and fundamental force. By contrast, it must have been assumed that each totem corresponded to a specifically different *mana* whose action could not be extended

¹ An analysis of this idea is found in Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, 'Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie', *L'Année sociologique*, 7 (1904), 108.

beyond the clan and the circle of things ascribed to it. The notion of a unique and universal *mana* could occur only when a tribal religion transcended the clan cults and absorbed them more or less completely. The new sense of tribal unity awakened a sense of the essential unity of the world. Of course, we will demonstrate below that the societies of Australia are already familiar with a cult common to the whole tribe. But if this cult represents the highest form of Australian religion, it has not managed to modulate and modify the principles on which it rests: totemism is essentially a federated religion that cannot go beyond a certain degree of centralization without ceasing to be itself.

One characteristic fact reveals that this is why the notion of *mana* has remained so specialized in Australia. The religious forces proper, those conceived as totems, are not the only forces the Australian feels obliged to reckon with. There are also the forces wielded by the magician. While religious forces are in principle considered salutary and beneficent, the others serve chiefly to cause sickness and death. Just as they differ in their effects, they also differ in their relations with the social organization. A totem always belongs to a clan; by contrast, magic is a tribal and even an intertribal institution. Magical forces properly belong to no particular part of the tribe. To take advantage of them, the appropriate recipes will do. Likewise, everyone is vulnerable to the effects of such magic and so must guard against it. These are vague forces that are not especially attached to any particular sector of society and can even extend their action beyond the tribe. Yet it is noteworthy that among the Arunta and the Loritja, they are conceived simply as aspects and specific forms of the same force, called in Arunta *arungquiltha* or *arunkulta*. [. . .] This name is given to the bones and pieces of wood used to cast evil spells and make animal or plant poisons. It is definitely a harmful *mana*. [. . .] Among these different peoples, then, while religious forces proper preserve a certain heterogeneity, magical forces are conceived as being similar in nature, as generic. They glide above the social organization, above its divisions and subdivisions, moving in a homogeneous and continuous space where they encounter nothing to differentiate them. Religious forces, by contrast, are localized within defined and distinct social frameworks, and are diversified and particularized in the image of the settings in which they are found.

We can see, then, to what extent the meaning and spirit of Australian totemism resides in the notion of an impersonal religious force, since this appears clearly as soon as there is no force to oppose it. It is true that the *arungquiltha* is a purely magical force. But magical forces and religious forces are not different in nature;¹ indeed, they are sometimes designated by the same word. In Melanesia, the magician and his spells have *mana*, as do the officiants and rites of the cult. Among the Iroquois the word *orenda* is used in the same way. The nature of one can be legitimately inferred from the nature of the other.

III

The conclusion to which the preceding analysis has led us is of interest not only to the history of totemism but to the origins of religious thought in general.

On the assumption that man was originally dominated by the senses and sensory representations, it has often been claimed that he began by imagining the divine in the concrete form of definite and personal beings. The facts do not confirm this assumption. We have just described a logically linked set of religious beliefs which we have reason to think are very primitive, yet we have not encountered any personalities of this kind. The totemic cult proper is addressed neither to specific animals or plants, nor even to a plant or animal species, but to a sort of vague power that permeates all things.² Even in the most advanced religions that have come from totemism, like those we see among the Indians of North America, this idea, far from disappearing, becomes more self-conscious. It takes on a clarity it did not previously have, even as it reaches a higher level of generality and dominates the entire religious system.

This is the basic material for constructing the various beings that religions of every era have sanctified and worshipped. Spirits,

¹ George Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions in North-West and Western Australia*, vol. ii (London: T. & W. Boone, 1841), 400. Moreover, Spencer and Gillen implicitly recognize this when they say that the *arungquiltha* is 'a supernatural force'. Cf. Hubert and Mauss, 'Esquisse', 119.

² Of course we shall see below (Book II, Chs. 8 and 9) that totemism is no stranger to the idea of mythic personality. But we will show that these conceptions are the product of secondary formations: they derive from the beliefs just analysed and are not basic to totemism.

demons, genies, gods of every rank are merely the concrete forms that capture this energy, this 'potentiality', as Hewitt¹ calls it, as it is individualized and fixed on a particular object or a particular point in space and concentrated around a being that is ideal and legendary but conceived as real by the popular imagination. A Dakota native interviewed by Miss Fletcher expressed this basic consubstantiality of all sacred things in a language full of vivid images:

All that moves stops at one place or another, at one moment or another. The bird that flies stops somewhere to make its nest, somewhere else to rest from flight. The man who walks stops when he pleases. The same is true for the deity. The Sun, so bright and magnificent, is one place where [the deity] has stopped. The trees and the animals are others. The Indian thinks of these places and sends his prayers there, that they may reach the place where god has stopped and thus obtain succor and benediction.²

In other words, *wakan* (for this is what the Dakota was talking about) comes and goes through the world, and sacred things are the places where it has come to rest. Here we have come quite a distance from naturism and animism. If the sun, moon, and stars were worshipped, this honour is not due to their intrinsic nature or to their distinctive properties, but to the fact that they were imagined as participating in that force which alone gives things their sacred character and is found again and again in many other beings, even the smallest. The souls of the dead have been the object of rites, not because they were considered to be made of some fluid and evanescent substance, nor because they resemble the shadow projected by a body or its reflection on the surface of the water. Lightness and fluidity are not enough to confer sanctity; but they were invested with this dignity only to the extent that they possessed some of that same force, the source of all religious feeling.

Now it is clearer why we could not define religion in terms of mythic personalities, gods or spirits, since this way of representing religious things is not in the least inherent in their nature. At the source and basis of religious thought we find, not particular and distinct objects or beings that possess a sacred character in

¹ J. N. B. Hewitt, 'Orenda and a Definition of Religion', *American Anthropologist*, 4 (1903), 38.

² *Report of the Peabody Museum*, 3: 276n. (cited by James Owen Dorsey, 'A Study of Siouan Cults', in *Eleventh Annual Report* (Washington: BAE, Washington Government Printing Office, 1893), 435).

themselves, but vague powers, anonymous forces. These are more or less numerous, depending on the society—sometimes they are even a single force—and their impersonality is strictly comparable to that of the physical forces whose manifestations are studied by the natural sciences. As for particular sacred things, they are merely individualized forms of this basic principle. It is not surprising, then, that even in religions in which authentic deities exist, there are efficacious rites independent of any divine intervention. This force can attach itself to words and gestures as well as to material substances; voice and movement can be its vehicle, and it can produce its effects through them without the help of any god or spirit. When this force is primarily concentrated in a rite, that rite will even become a creator of deities. Perhaps this is why there is no divine personality that does not preserve some impersonal element.

Even those who imagine this force most clearly in a concrete and visible form think of it at the same time as an abstract power that can be defined only by its efficacy, a force that deploys itself through space and is, at least to some extent, in each of its effects. It is the power to produce rain or wind, harvest or daylight; Zeus is in every drop of rain that falls, just as Ceres is in every sheaf of the harvest.¹ More often than not, this efficacy is so imperfectly defined that the believer can have only a vague notion of it. This vagueness, moreover, has made possible those syncretisms and doublings by which the gods are fragmented, dismembered, and combined in all sorts of ways. There is perhaps no single religion in which the original *mana*, singular or plural, is entirely resolved in a specific number of discrete and self-enclosed beings. Each of them always preserves a halo of impersonality that enables it to enter into new combinations, not simply because it is a surviving remnant, but because religious forces are by nature incapable of complete individualization.

This conception, which the study of totemism alone suggested to us, has in its favour the fact that several scholars have been led to it independently of late, in the course of very different kinds of

¹ Expressions like Ζεύς, θεῖ, or *Ceres succiditur*, show that this conception survived in Greece and in Rome. Moreover, Hermann Usener, in his *Götternamen: Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung* (Bonn: F. Cohen, 1896), has clearly shown that the gods of Greece, like those of Rome, were originally impersonal forces that were imagined only in terms of their attributes.

research. A spontaneous consensus on this point seems to be emerging, which is worth noting for its presumption of objectivity.

We have been arguing since 1899 for the need to exclude any notion of mythic personality from the definition of religion.¹ In 1900, Marrett called attention to the existence of a religious phase he called *preanimist*, in which rites were addressed to impersonal forces such as the Melanesian *mana* or the *wakan* of the Omaha and the Dakota.² [. . .]

A short time later, Hubert and Mauss, attempting to devise a general theory of magic, established that magic as a whole is based on the notion of *mana*.³ Given the close kinship of magical rites and religious rites, we might expect the same theory to apply to religion. This is Preuss's contention in a series of articles that appeared in *Globus*⁴ in the same year. Relying on facts drawn from American civilizations, Preuss set out to show that ideas of soul and spirit were formed only after those of impersonal power and force, that the first are merely a transformation of the second, and that until relatively recently they preserved the mark of their original impersonality. [. . .]

Thus the same idea is tending to emerge from all quarters.⁵ Increasingly the impression is that mythological constructions, even the most basic, are secondary products and veil a fund of beliefs—at once simpler and more obscure, vaguer and more fundamental—that constitute the firm foundations on which religious systems are built. It is this primitive fund of beliefs that the analysis of totemism has allowed us to reach. [. . .] Indeed, we may have found the seminal notion from which the ideas of *wakan* and *mana* are derived: the notion of the totemic principle.

¹ Émile Durkheim, 'De la définition des phénomènes religieux', *L'Année sociologique*, 2 (1899), 14–16.

² R. R. Marrett, 'Preanimistic Religion', *Folk-lore*, 11 (1900), 162–82.

³ Hubert and Mauss, 'Esquisse', 108 ff.

⁴ Konrad Theodor Preuss, 'Der Ursprung der Religion und Kunst', *Globus*, 86 (1904), 321, 355, 376, 389; 87 (1905), 333, 347, 380, 394, 419.

⁵ It is found even in the recent theories of Frazer. For if this scholar entirely rejects the religious character of totemism and makes it a kind of magic, he does so precisely because the forces unleashed by the totemic cult are impersonal, like those manipulated by the magician. Frazer recognizes the basic fact that we have just established, only he draws a different conclusion from it because, in his view, there is religion only where there are mythic personalities.

IV

This notion is not only of primary importance because of its role in the development of religious ideas; it also has a secular aspect which is relevant to the history of scientific thought. It is the notion of force in its earliest form.

As it is represented by the Sioux, *wakan* plays the same role in the world as the forces by which science explains the various phenomena of nature. Not that it is imagined as an exclusively physical form of energy; on the contrary, as we shall see in the following chapter, the elements that form *wakan* are taken from the most disparate realms. But this composite nature enables its use as a principle of universal explanation. It is the source of all life; 'all life is *wakan*'; and the word 'life' means everything that acts and reacts, everything that moves or is moved, mineral as well as biological. *Wakan* is the cause of all movements in the universe. [. . .] When the Iroquois says that all natural life is the product of conflicts between the varying concentrations of *orenda* belonging to different beings, he is only expressing in his language the modern idea that the world is a system of forces that limit, check, and balance each other.

The Melanesian attributes the same efficacy to *mana*. Thanks to his *mana* a man is successful in hunting or war, his gardens flourish, his herds prosper. The arrow finds its target because it is charged with *mana*; the same is true for the net that catches lots of fish, the canoe that easily takes to the water, and so on. Granted, if we took some of Codrington's expressions literally, *mana* would be the cause to which the natives attribute 'all that exceeds the power of man, all that is outside the ordinary course of nature'.¹ But the very examples he cites suggest that the sphere of *mana* is more extensive. In reality it is used to explain usual and everyday phenomena; there is nothing superhuman or supernatural about a seaworthy boat, a successful hunter, and so on. Among these events of daily life, some are so insignificant and so familiar that they pass unnoticed: no one observes them so no one feels the need to account for them. The concept of *mana* is applied only to those things that are important enough to attract attention, that arouse a minimum of interest and curiosity; but they are no more marvellous. And what is true of

¹ Codrington, *The Melanesians*, 119.

mana, as it is of *orenda* or *wakan*, can also be said of the totemic principle. It maintains the life of clan members, animals or plants of the totemic species, as well as all things that are classified under the totem and participate in its nature.

The notion of force is therefore religious in origin. First philosophy, then the sciences borrowed from religion. Comte already understood this when he made metaphysics the heir of 'theology'. He drew the conclusion that the idea of force was fated to disappear from science because, due to its mythic origins, he denied it any objective value. We, in contrast, shall demonstrate that religious forces are real, however imperfect the symbols that have been used to help conceive of them. And it will follow that the same is true of the concept of force in general.

CHAPTER 7

THE ORIGINS OF THESE BELIEFS (Conclusion)

III. THE GENESIS OF THE NOTION OF THE TOTEMIC PRINCIPLE OR MANA

THE proposition established in the previous chapter defines the terms in which the problem of the origins of totemism must be posed. Since totemism is entirely dominated by the notion of a quasi-divine principle immanent in certain categories of men and things, and imagined in animal or plant form, to explain this religion is to explain this belief—to discover why men constructed this idea and what materials they used to do it.

I

Evidently sensations were not responsible for bringing the things conceived as totems to men's minds, for as we have shown these things are often insignificant. The lizard, caterpillar, rat, ant, frog, turkey, bream, plum tree, cockatoo, and so on—to cite only a few names frequently found on the lists of Australian totems—do not inherently produce those great and powerful impressions that sometimes resemble religious feelings and lend a sacred character to the objects that stimulate them. Certainly this is not the case with stars or major atmospheric phenomena, which are by contrast obviously striking to the imagination. Yet these very rarely serve as totems; and they were probably called upon to fill this function only belatedly.¹ So it was not the intrinsic nature of the thing for which the clan is named that singled it out as the object of a cult. Moreover, if the feelings it inspired were really the determining cause of totemic rites and beliefs, it would be the sacred being par excellence; the animals or plants used as totems would play the leading role in religious life. Yet we know that the focus of the cult lies elsewhere, in the drawn representations of that plant or animal; totemic emblems and symbols of all kinds are what possess the greatest sanctity. These, then,

¹ See above, p. 89.

must be the source of the religious feeling that is merely reflected in the real objects these emblems represent.

Thus the totem is above all a symbol, a material expression of something else. But of what?

Our analysis suggests that the totem expresses and symbolizes two different kinds of things. On the one hand, it is the external and tangible form of what we have called the totemic principle, or god. But on the other, it is the symbol of that particular society we call the clan. It is its flag; it is the sign by which each clan distinguishes itself from others, the visible mark of its personality, a mark that embodies everything that belongs to the clan in any way: men, animals, and things. So if the totem is both the symbol of god and of society, are these not one and the same? How could the group's emblem become the face of this quasi-divinity if the group and the divinity were two distinct realities? The god of the clan, the totemic principle, must therefore be the clan itself, but transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal species that serve as totems.

But how was this apotheosis possible and how did it come about in this way?

II

Generally speaking, a society is quite capable of arousing the sensation of the divine, simply by its influence over the minds of its members. To them, it is like a god to the faithful. Indeed, in the first instance, a god is a being whom man imagines superior to himself in some respects and on whom he thinks he depends. Whether this involves a sentient personality, like Zeus or Yahweh, or a play of abstract forces like those in totemism, the faithful in either case believe they are held to certain kinds of behaviour imposed by the nature of the sacred principle with which they are engaged. Now, society also arouses in us the sensation of perpetual dependence. Because it has its own nature separate from ours as individuals, it pursues ends that are equally its own: but because it can reach them only through us, it imperiously demands our cooperation. Society requires us to become its servants, forgetting our own interests, and compels us to endure all sorts of hardships, privations, and sacrifice without which social life would be impossible. Thus we are constantly forced to submit to rules of thought and behaviour that we

have neither devised nor desired, and that are sometimes even contrary to our most basic inclinations and instincts.

However, if society could wring these concessions and sacrifices from us only through physical constraint, it would suggest the idea of a physical force to which we must submit, but not the idea of a moral power of the sort worshipped by religions. In reality, however, society's hold on the mind owes far less to its physical supremacy than it does to the moral authority with which it is invested. We defer to its rules, not simply because it has the weapons to overcome our resistance, but above all because it is the object of genuine respect.

An individual or collective object is said to inspire respect when the conscious representation of it is endowed with such power that it automatically stimulates or inhibits behaviour, *regardless of any relative consideration of its practical or harmful effects*.^{*} When we obey someone because of the moral authority we recognize in him, we follow his advice, not because he seems to be wise, but because a psychic energy immanent in the idea we have of this person makes us bend our will and incline to compliance. Respect is the emotion we experience when we feel this internal and entirely mental pressure. We are then moved, not by the advantages or inconveniences of the behaviour prescribed or recommended to us, but by the way we imagine the person who has recommended or prescribed it. This is why an order is generally expressed briefly and sharply, leaving no room for hesitation. To the extent that an order is an order and works through its own power, it excludes any idea of deliberation and calculation, deriving its impact from the intensity of the mental state in which it is given. This intensity constitutes what we call moral authority.

Now, the behaviour to which society is strongly enough attached to impose it on its members is marked by the distinctive sign that provokes respect. Because this behaviour is elaborated in common, its vividness in each individual mind finds echoes in the others. The representations that express it in each of us, then, have an intensity that pure states of individual consciousness could not attain: for they are fortified by the numerous individual representations that have shaped them. Society speaks through the mouth of those who affirm them in our presence: when we hear them, we hear society speak, and the collective voice has a resonance that a single voice cannot

have.¹ Even the violence with which society reacts against attempts at dissidence, whether by blame or physical repression, helps to reinforce its hold by forcefully displaying the heat of common conviction.² In short, when a thing is the object of prevailing opinion, each individual's representation of it draws such power from its origins, from the conditions of its birth, that it is felt even by those who do not submit to it. It tends to suppress representations that contradict it, keeping them at a distance, and instead authorizes acts that embody it. This is done not by physical coercion or the threat of it, but by the simple radiance of mental energy. The sign of this moral authority is that it derives uniquely from psychic properties. Opinion, a pre-eminently social thing, is therefore a source of authority, and we can even speculate whether all authority is not the daughter of opinion.³ Some will object that science is often the combative antagonist of opinion, rectifying its errors. But science can succeed in this task only if it has sufficient authority, and it can draw this authority only from opinion itself.* All the scientific demonstrations in the world would have no influence if a people had no faith in science. Even today, if science happens to go against a strong current of public opinion, it risks losing its credibility.⁴

Because social pressure exerts its influence mentally, it was bound to give man the idea that one or more powers exist outside him, powers both moral and forceful, that compel his submission. Since these powers speak to him in the tone of authority and sometimes

¹ See Émile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social: étude sur l'organisation de sociétés supérieures* (3rd edn., Paris: Alcan, 1902), 64 ff.

² Ibid. 76.

³ At least this is the case for all moral authority recognized as such by a collective.

⁴ We hope this analysis and those that follow will put an end to an incorrect interpretation of our thought which has given rise to more than one misunderstanding. Because we have made constraint the *external sign* by which social facts can be most easily recognized and distinguished from facts of individual psychology, some think we hold physical constraint to be the essence of social life. In reality we have never regarded it as anything more than the tangible, visible expression of an internal and underlying fact that is, in itself, entirely abstract, namely *moral authority*. The problem for sociology—if it can be said that there is *one* sociological problem—is to search through the various forms of external constraint for the various kinds of corresponding moral authority, and to discover their causes. Specifically, the chief aim of the present work is to discover the form in which the particular kind of moral authority inherent in all religious things was created, and what it is made of. Moreover, it will become clear that while making social pressure one of the distinctive features of sociological phenomena, we do not mean to say that this is the only one. We shall reveal another aspect of collective life that is nearly its opposite, though no less real (see p. 159).

even tell him to violate his most natural inclinations, man must imagine these powers as partly external to himself. Of course, there would be no mythological interpretations if he could readily see that these influences emanate from society. But social action works in circuitous and obscure ways, using psychic mechanisms that are too complex for the ordinary observer to perceive their source. Until scientific analysis comes along to enlighten him, he does sense that he is acted upon, but not by what. So he must construct piecemeal the notion of those powers with which he feels connected. And from this we can see how he was led to imagine them in alien forms and transfigure them through thought.

A god is not only an authority to which we submit, however; it is also a force that supports our own. The man who has obeyed his god, and therefore believes he is on his side, approaches the world with confidence and the feeling of accumulated energy. Similarly, social action is not limited to demanding our sacrifices, privations, and efforts. For collective force is not wholly external to us; it does not move us entirely from the outside. Indeed, since society can exist only in individual minds and through them,¹ it must penetrate and become organized inside us; it becomes an integral part of our being, and in so doing it elevates and enlarges that being.

There are circumstances in which this reassuring and invigorating action is particularly evident. Within a crowd moved by a common passion, we become susceptible to feelings and actions of which we are incapable on our own. And when the crowd is dissolved, when we find ourselves alone again and fall back to our usual level, we can then measure how far we were raised above ourselves. History is full of examples. We need only think of the night of 4 August,* when a crowd was suddenly transported in an act of sacrifice and abnegation which each of its members had rejected the evening before and which surprised them the following day. For this reason all parties—political, economic, or denominational—deliberately hold periodic meetings in which their members may renew their common faith by some collective demonstration. To reaffirm feelings that might fade if left to themselves, it is enough to bring those who share them together into a closer and more active relationship. This also explains

¹ Which does not mean, of course, that collective consciousness does not have specific features (on this point see 'Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 6 (1898), 273 ff.).

the special attitude of the man who speaks to a crowd—if he has managed to enter into communion with it. His language has a kind of grandiloquence that would be absurd in ordinary circumstances; his gestures are overbearing; his thought itself is impatient with order and easily becomes carried away in all sorts of extreme pronouncements. He feels filled to overflowing with an overabundance of forces that spill out around him. Sometimes he even feels dominated by a moral power that is larger than he is, for which he is merely the interpreter. This quality marks what is often called the demon of oratorical inspiration. This unusual surplus of forces is quite real: it comes to him from the very group he is addressing. The feelings provoked by his speech return to him inflated and amplified, reinforcing his own. The passionate energies he arouses echo back to him and increase his vitality. He is no longer a simple individual speaking, he is a group incarnate and personified.

Apart from these passing or intermittent states, there are more lasting ones in which society's tonic influence is felt more permanently and often more strikingly. In certain historical periods, under the influence of some great collective upheaval, social interactions become more frequent and more active. Individuals seek each other out and assemble more often. The result is a general effervescence characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. Now, this hyperactivity has the effect of generally stimulating individual energies. People live differently and more intensely than in normal times. The changes are not only those of nuance and degree; man himself becomes other. He is moved by passions so intense that they can be assuaged only by violent, extreme acts of superhuman heroism or bloody barbarism. This explains the Crusades, for example, and so many sublime or savage moments during the French Revolution. Under the influence of general exaltation, the most mediocre and inoffensive burgher is transformed into a hero or an executioner. And all these mental processes are so clearly those at the root of religion that individuals themselves often represent this pressure in an explicitly religious form. The crusaders believed in the presence of God among them, summoning them to conquer the Holy Land; Joan of Arc believed she was obeying celestial voices.¹

¹ Feelings of fear and sadness can also develop and intensify under the same influences. They correspond, as we shall see, to another aspect of religious life (see Book III, Ch. 5).

But this stimulating action of society is not only experienced under exceptional circumstances; there is no moment in our life without some rush of energy coming to us from the outside. In various demonstrations of sympathy, esteem, and affection from his peers, the man who does his duty finds a sustaining comfort which he usually takes for granted. Society's feeling for him elevates his feelings for himself. Because he is in moral harmony with his contemporaries, he has more confidence, courage, and audacity—like the believer who thinks he feels the eyes of his god turned benevolently toward him. Thus our moral being is perpetually sustained. Because it varies according to so many external circumstances—our more or less active relations with the social groups that surround us, the identity of these groups—we are bound to feel that this moral *tonus* depends on an external cause; but we do not perceive where or what it is. And we tend to conceive of it in the form of a moral power that, while immanent in us, represents something other than ourselves. This is moral consciousness, which the ordinary man has never distinctly imagined for himself except with the aid of religious symbols.

Beyond these free-ranging forces that continually replenish our own, there are others that are fixed within all sorts of observed practices and traditions. We speak a language we have not created; we use tools we have not invented; we invoke rights we have not instituted; each generation inherits a treasure trove of knowledge it did not amass itself. We owe these various benefits of civilization to society, and if we do not generally perceive their source, at least we know they are not of our making.* Yet this is what makes man distinct among all creatures; for man is man only because he is civilized. He could not escape the feeling that outside him there are powerful causes which are the source of his characteristic nature, benevolent powers that aid him, protect him, and assure him a privileged fate. And he necessarily granted those powers a dignity comparable to the great value of the benefits he attributed to them.¹

¹ This is the other aspect of society which, if imperative, seems to us good and benevolent. It dominates us and helps us. If we have defined the social fact more by the first of these qualities than the second, that is because dominance is more easily observable since it is translated by external and visible signs; but we never thought to deny the reality of the second (see *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (2nd edn., Paris: Alcan, 1901), preface p. xx n. 1).

Thus our environment seems populated by forces at once imperious and helpful, august and benevolent. Because we are conscious of their pressure on us, we locate those forces outside ourselves, as we do the objective causes of our sensations. On the other hand, the feelings they inspire in us are inherently different from those we have for simple physical things. As long as these things are defined by empirical qualities manifest in daily experience and are not transformed by the religious imagination, we feel no special respect for them and they have none of what it takes to raise us above ourselves. Therefore the representations that express them seem to us very different from those that collective influences awaken in us. These different sorts of representations form separate mental states in our consciousness, as distinct and separate as the two forms of life to which they correspond. Consequently, we feel as though we are engaged in two distinct realities, separated by a clearly drawn line of demarcation: the world of profane things on the one hand, the world of sacred things on the other.

Moreover, now as in the past, we observe society constantly creating new sacred things. Let a man capture its imagination and seem to embody its principal aspirations as well as the means to fulfil them, and this man will be set apart and considered nearly divine. Opinion will invest him with a majesty quite similar to the majesty that protects the gods. This happened to many sovereigns in whom their century had faith and who, if not deified themselves, were seen as direct representatives of divinity. And proof that this sort of apotheosis is the work of society alone is that society has often consecrated men who did not deserve it. Furthermore, the simple deference that men invested with high social positions inspire is not inherently different from religious respect. It is translated by the same gestures: keeping our distance from a high-ranking person; approaching him only with precautions; using another language in speaking to him and gestures other than those we use with ordinary mortals. Our feeling in these circumstances is so closely akin to religious feeling that many peoples have combined the two. Princes, noblemen, and political leaders are considered sacred to explain the regard they enjoy. In Melanesia and in Polynesia, for example, people say that an influential man has *mana*, and impute his influence to this. It is clear, however, that his situation is solely the result of public opinion. Therefore, the moral power conferred by opinion and the moral

power invested in sacred beings have the same underlying origin and are composed of the same elements. This explains how the same word might be used to designate both.

And along with men, society also consecrates things, especially ideas. When a belief is unanimously shared by a people, to deny or challenge it is forbidden for reasons we have discussed above. Now, to prohibit criticism is a prohibition like any other and proves that we are in the presence of something sacred. Even today, with all the freedom we grant each other, it would be sacrilege for a man to deny progress and flout the humanistic ideal to which modern societies are attached. At the very least there is a principle that even peoples most enamoured of free enquiry tend to place above discussion and to regard as untouchable, or sacred: that is the principle of free enquiry.

Society's capacity to set itself up as a god or to create gods was nowhere more visible than in the first years of the [French] Revolution. In the general enthusiasm of that period, things that were purely secular in nature were transformed by public opinion into sacred things: homeland, liberty, and reason. A religion propelled by its own momentum was established with its dogma, symbols, altars, and holidays. The cult of Reason and of the Supreme Being tried to bring a kind of official fulfilment to these spontaneous aspirations. Granted, this religious renewal was transitory. The patriotic fervour that originally moved the masses died away, and once the cause disappeared, the effect could not be sustained. But the experience, however brief, is still of sociological interest. After all, in this particular case we can see society and its essential ideas become the object of an actual cult directly, without any kind of transfiguration.

All these facts already show us how the clan can awaken in its members the idea that there are forces outside them that both dominate and sustain them—in short, religious forces: for primitive man does not owe his most direct and intimate allegiance to the larger society. The ties that bind him to the tribe are slack and weak.* Although the tribe is certainly not foreign to him, it is with the members of his clan that he has most in common, and it is the action of this group that he feels most immediately and so prefers to express in religious symbols.

This first explanation is too general, however, since it indiscriminately applies to any society and so to any religion. Let us attempt,

therefore, to specify what particular form this collective action takes in the clan and how it inspires the sense of the sacred. For collective action is most easily observed and most apparent in its results.

III

The life of Australian societies alternates between two different phases.¹ At times the population is scattered in small groups that go about their business independently. Each family lives by itself, hunting and fishing—in short, striving by all possible means to provide for its needs. At other times, by contrast, the population is concentrated and condensed in particular places for a period varying from several days to several months. This concentration takes place when a clan or a tribal group is summoned to meet, and on this occasion they hold either a religious ceremony or what ethnographers call a corroboree.²

These two phases offer the starkest contrast. In the first, economic activity is predominant and generally rather low-key. Gathering grains and grasses necessary for food and hunting or fishing are not occupations that stir great passion. The dispersed nature of the society makes life rather monotonous, lazy, and dull. But when a corroboree takes place, everything changes. Because the primitive's emotional and passionate faculties are not fully under the mastery of his reason and will, he easily loses self-control. An event of any importance immediately takes him outside himself. He greets happy news with transports of enthusiasm. The opposite has him running around like a madman, crying, shouting, throwing fistfuls of dust in all directions, biting himself, brandishing his weapons furiously, and so on. The very fact of assembling is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once the individuals are assembled, their proximity generates a kind of electricity that quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every emotion expressed is retained without resistance in all those minds so open to external impressions, each one echoing the others. The initial impulse thus becomes

¹ See Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, 33.

² The corroboree is distinct from a religious rite in that it is open to women and the uninitiated. But while these two sorts of collective manifestations must be distinguished, they are none the less closely related. We will have occasion elsewhere to return to this relationship and explain it.

amplified as it reverberates, like an avalanche gathering force as it goes. And as passions so strong and uncontrolled are bound to seek outward expression, there are violent gestures, shouts, even howls, deafening noises of all sorts from all sides that intensify even more the state they express. Probably because a collective feeling cannot be expressed collectively unless a certain order is observed that permits the group's harmonious movements, these gestures and cries are inclined to be rhythmic and regulated, and become chants and dances. But in taking on a more regulated form they lose none of their natural violence; the regulated tumult is still a tumult. The human voice is inadequate to the task, and is artificially reinforced: boomerangs are knocked together, bull-roarers are whirled. The original function of these instruments, so widely used in Australian religious ceremonies, was probably to give more satisfying translation to this excitement. But even as they translate, they reinforce. The effervescence often becomes so intense it leads to unpredictable behaviour. The passions unleashed are so impetuous they cannot be contained. The ordinary conditions of life are set aside so definitively and so consciously that people feel the need to put themselves above and beyond customary morality. The sexes violate the rules of sexual conduct. Men exchange their wives. Sometimes even incestuous unions, which are harshly condemned as abominations in normal times, are openly contracted with impunity.¹ If we add that these ceremonies generally take place at night, in darkness pierced here and there by firelight, we can easily imagine the effect such scenes must have on the minds of all participants, stimulating such violent overexcitement, physically and mentally, that it becomes nearly unbearable. The participant taking the leading role finally falls to the ground, exhausted. [. . .]

It is not difficult to imagine that a man in such a state of exaltation no longer knows himself. Feeling possessed and led by some external power that makes him think and act differently from normal times,

¹ See Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 96-7; *Northern Tribes*, 137; Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, ii. 319. This ritual promiscuity is observed notably in initiation ceremonies (Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 267, 381; A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 657) and in totemic ceremonies (Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 214, 237, and 298). The ordinary rules of exogamy are violated during these ceremonies. Nevertheless, among the Arunta, unions between father and daughter, son and mother, brothers and sisters (all blood kinship) remain prohibited (Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 96-7).

he naturally feels he is no longer himself. He seems to have become a new being: the decorations he dons and the masks he uses to cover his face give material form to this internal transformation even more than they induce it. And as all his companions feel transfigured in the same way at the same moment, and translate their feeling through their shouts, gestures, and posture, it is as though he really were transported into a special world entirely different from the ordinary, a setting populated by exceptionally intense forces that invade and transform him. Experiences like these, especially when they are repeated every day for weeks, must leave him with the conviction that indeed two worlds exist that are heterogeneous and incommensurable. One is the world in which he languidly lives his daily life; the other he cannot penetrate without abruptly entering into relations with extraordinary powers that excite him to the point of delirium. The first is the world of the profane, the second the world of sacred things.

Therefore it is in these effervescent social settings, and from this very effervescence, that the religious idea seems to be born. And this origin seems confirmed by the fact that in Australia, strictly religious activity is almost entirely concentrated in the times when these assemblies are held. Of course, there is no people for whom the great solemn rituals of the cult are not more or less periodic; but in more advanced societies there is some ritual homage to the gods virtually every day. In Australia, by contrast, the time apart from clan and tribal festivals is almost entirely taken up with secular and profane functions. Of course there are prohibitions that must be and are observed even during these periods of secular activity; it is never permitted to kill or freely eat the totemic animal—at least where the prohibition has preserved its original force. But no positive rite or ceremony of any importance is celebrated. These take place only in the midst of assembled groups. The religious life of the Australian therefore alternates between phases of utter slackness and hyper-excitement, and social life shifts according to the same rhythm. This reveals the bond between the two, while among so-called civilized people the relative continuity of these phases in part masks their relationship. Perhaps the violence of this contrast was necessary for the sensation of the sacred to erupt in its primary form. By gathering together almost always at fixed times, collective life could indeed achieve its maximum intensity and efficacy, and

so give man a more vivid sense of his dual existence and his dual nature.

But this explanation is still incomplete. We have indeed shown how the clan awakens in its members the idea of external forces that dominate and exalt them. But we have yet to understand how these forces were conceived in the form of the totemic species, that is, as an animal or plant.

The reason is that this animal or plant has given its name to the clan and serves as its emblem. Indeed, it is a well-known law that the feelings something awakens in us are spontaneously communicated to the symbol that represents it. For us, black is the sign of mourning and so suggests sad thoughts. This transfer of feelings simply occurs because the idea of the thing and the idea of its symbol are closely connected in our minds: as a result, the emotions provoked by one are contagiously extended to the other. But this contagion, which happens in all cases to some degree, is much more complete and marked when the symbol is something simple, specific, and easily imagined. The thing itself is difficult to grasp mentally in all its dimensions, parts, and complexity. We would not know how to locate the source of powerful feelings in an abstract entity, which we can imagine only vaguely and with great effort. We can comprehend those feelings only in relation to a concrete object whose reality is vividly striking. If the thing itself does not fulfil this condition, it cannot serve as a point of attachment for our feelings, even if it aroused them in the first place. So the sign takes the place of the object, and the emotions it arouses are attached to that sign. The sign is loved, feared, and respected; the sign is the object of gratitude and sacrifice. The soldier who dies for his flag, dies for his country; but in his mind the flag comes first. It can even prompt action directly. The country will not be lost if a solitary flag remains in the hands of the enemy, and yet the soldier gets himself killed trying to recapture it. We forget that the flag is only a sign, that it has no intrinsic value but serves only to recall the reality it represents; we treat it as if it were that reality.

The totem is the clan's flag. It is therefore natural that the feelings the clan awakens in individual consciousness—feelings of dependence and increased vitality—are much more attached to the idea of the totem than to that of the clan. The clan is too complex a reality for such rudimentary minds to picture clearly its concrete unity.

Moreover, the primitive does not even see that these feelings come to him from the group. He does not know that the proximity of a certain number of men living a similar life has the effect of releasing new energies that transform each of them. All he feels is that he is raised above himself and is living a different life from the one he ordinarily leads. However, he must see some causal link between these sensations and some external object. Now, what does he see around him? On all sides his attention is caught by multiple images of the totem. He sees the *waniga* and the *nurtunja*, symbols of the sacred being. He sees bull-roarers and *churingas* engraved with combinations of lines that have the same meaning. The decorations on various parts of his body are also totemic marks. Repeated everywhere in all forms, this image is bound to take on an exceptional importance in people's minds. Placed centre stage, it becomes their representative. It is the only concrete object to which felt emotions can be attached. And the totemic symbol continues to recall those feelings even when the assembly is dissolved; for it survives, engraved on the instruments of the cult, on rock walls, on shields, and so on. Through it the emotions felt on these occasions are perpetually sustained and revived, as though it inspired them directly. These emotions are ascribed to it quite naturally since they are shared by the group and can be related only to something that is equally held in common. The totemic emblem alone satisfies this condition. By definition, it is shared by everyone. During the ceremony, all eyes are upon it. Generations may change but it remains the same; it is the permanent element in social life. The mysterious forces with which men feel in communion seem to emanate from it, and so we understand the common explanation for how men were led to represent these forces in the features of the animate or inanimate being whose name the clan bears.

This said, we are now able to understand the essential elements of totemic beliefs.

Because religious force is nothing but the collective and anonymous force of the clan, and because this can be imagined only in the form of the totem, the totemic emblem is like the visible body of the god. Therefore it seems to be the source of actions, benevolent or dreaded, which the cult's purpose is to invoke or prevent. So it is to the totem that rites are specifically addressed. This explains why the totem ranks first in the pantheon of sacred things.

But like any society, the clan can live only in and through the individual minds that compose it. While religious force as embodied in the totem seems external to individuals and transcendent, it is also true that, like the clan it symbolizes, this force can be realized only in and through those individuals. In this sense, it is immanent in them and they necessarily imagine it as such. They feel it present and acting in them, since it is this force that raises them to a higher life. So man came to believe that he had within him a principle comparable to that of the totem and attributed to himself an equally sacred character, though one less pronounced. For the emblem is the pre-eminent source of religious life. Man participates in it only indirectly and he is aware of this; he understands that the force that transports him into the circle of sacred things is not inherent in him but comes to him from outside.

For another reason, animals or plants of the totemic species came to have the same quality to an even greater degree. For if the totemic principle is nothing but the clan, it is the clan conceived in the physical form represented by the emblem. And this form is also the form of those concrete beings whose name the clan bears. Because of this resemblance, they were bound to awaken feelings similar to those aroused by the emblem itself. Since this emblem is the object of religious respect, the animals and plants of the totemic species must have inspired a similar respect and seemed sacred as well. The faithful could not help attributing forces of the same nature to such perfectly identical forms. So it is forbidden to kill or eat the totemic animal, and its flesh is thought to have positive virtues invoked by the proper rites. After all, the totemic animal resembles the clan emblem, namely its own image. And since it looks more like the emblem than man does, it also ranks above him in the hierarchy of sacred things. There is certainly a close kinship between these two beings since they share the same essence: both incarnate something of the totemic principle. Because this principle is conceived in an animal form, however, the animal seems to embody it more fully than man. That is why man respects it and treats it like an *elder* brother.¹

¹ We see that this brotherhood is a logical consequence of totemism rather than its premiss. Men did not believe in their duties toward the animals of the totemic species because they thought they were related to them; instead, they imagined this kinship in order to explain to themselves the nature of beliefs and rites in which these animals were central. The animal was regarded as a brother because it was a sacred being, like man; but it was not treated as a sacred being because it was thought to be related.

While the totemic principle resides primarily in a specific animal or plant species, it is not limited to that species. Sanctity is highly contagious,¹ and it spreads from the totemic being to all its adherents, near or far. The religious feelings the animal inspired were communicated to the substances it ate, creating or recreating its flesh and blood; such feelings were transferred to things that resemble it, to the totemic being and to various creatures with which it is in constant contact. Gradually subtotems became attached to totems, and those cosmological systems were established that express primitive classifications. Finally the entire world was divided up among the totemic principles of the same tribe.

Now we can understand the source of the ambiguous picture religious forces present when they appear in history, how they are both physical and human, moral and material. They are moral powers since they are wholly constructed from the feelings the collective moral being arouses in those other moral beings, the individuals; they express, not the way physical things affect our senses, but the way the collective conscience and consciousness affects these aspects of the individual. The authority of these forces is only one aspect of the moral ascendancy society exercises on its members. On the other hand, they are bound to seem closely related to material things because they are conceived in material forms. So they dominate both worlds. They reside in men, but at the same time they are the vital principles of things. They stimulate and discipline consciousness; but they also make plants grow and animals reproduce. Thanks to this dual nature religion could be the matrix in which the seeds of human civilization were developed. Because religion enclosed all of reality within itself, the physical as well as the moral universe, the forces that move bodies and minds were conceived in religious form. This is how the most varied techniques and practices—those that ensure the functioning of moral life (law, morality, the fine arts) and those that serve material life (the natural sciences, technology, industry)—derived directly or indirectly from religion.²

¹ See below, Book III, Ch. 1, §. III.

² We say that this derivation is sometimes indirect due to techniques that, for the most part, seem derived from religion only through the intermediary of magic (see Hubert and Mauss, 'Esquisse', 144 ff.). Indeed, magical forces are only a special form of religious forces. We will have many occasions to reiterate this point.

IV

The first religious conceptions have often been ascribed to feelings of weakness and dependence, a fear and anguish that must have seized man when he first came in contact with the world. The victim of a kind of nightmare of his own making, he imagined himself surrounded by hostile and awesome powers that had to be appeased by certain rites. But we have just shown that the first religions have an entirely different source. The famous formula *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor** is by no means warranted by the facts. The primitive did not see his gods as strangers, enemies, or essentially and necessarily malevolent beings whose favour he had to curry at all costs. On the contrary, to him the gods were friends, relations, and natural protectors. After all, these are the names he gives to beings of the totemic species. The power to which the cult is addressed is not imagined looming above him and crushing him with its superiority: on the contrary it is very near, conferring on him useful powers he does not inherently possess. Perhaps divinity was never closer to man than at this moment in history, since it is present in his immediate surroundings and immanent, in part, in himself. Joyous confidence, then, rather than terror and oppression, is at the root of totemism.

Apart from funeral rites—the sombre side of every religion—the totemic cult is celebrated with chanting, dancing, and dramatic performances. Cruel expiations are relatively rare, as we shall see; even compulsory and painful mutilations are not done in this spirit. Jealous and terrible gods appear only later in religious development. Primitive societies are not Leviathans* that overwhelm man with the enormity of their power and subject him to harsh discipline.¹ He surrenders to them spontaneously and without resistance. Because the social soul is in this case composed of only a few ideas and feelings, it is easily embodied as a whole in each individual consciousness. The individual bears it entirely within himself; it is part of him, and so when he yields to the impulses it inspires in him, he does not think he is yielding to coercion but rather heeding the call of his nature.²

* At least once he is adult and fully initiated. Initiation rites, which introduce the young man to social life, are in themselves a harsh discipline.

² On this particular aspect of primitive societies, see Durkheim, *Division du travail social*, 123, 149, 173 ff.

Now this way of understanding the genesis of religious thought escapes the objections raised by the most accredited classical theories.

We have seen how naturists and animists claimed to construct the notion of sacred beings from the sensations aroused in us by various physical or biological phenomena, and we have shown the impossible and even contradictory aspects of this enterprise. Nothing comes from nothing. The feelings the physical world evokes in us cannot, by definition, contain anything that transcends this world. From the tangible we can make only the tangible; we cannot make something unlimited from something limited.* And in order to explain how the notion of the sacred could emerge under these conditions, most theorists were forced to assume that man superimposed an unreal world on the reality he observed. This world was said to be constructed entirely of fantastic dream images or monstrous aberrations which the mythological imagination invented under the marvellous but deceptive influence of language. But if so, it is impossible to understand why humanity should persist for centuries in the errors that experience must have quickly exposed.

Adopting our point of view, these difficulties disappear. Religion is no longer some inexplicable hallucination and becomes rooted in reality. We can say, in fact, that the worshipper is not deluding himself when he believes in the existence of a higher moral power from which he derives his best self: that power exists, and it is society. When the Australian is transported beyond himself and feels life flowing in him with an intensity that surprises him, he is not prey to illusion. This exaltation is real, and it is really the product of forces external and superior to the individual. Of course he is mistaken when he believes that this heightened vitality is the work of a power that takes plant or animal form. But his error lies only in taking literally the symbol that represents this being to men's minds, or the form of its existence. Behind these figures and metaphors, crude or refined, there is a concrete and living reality.

Religion takes on a meaning and a logic that the most intransigent rationalist cannot fail to recognize. The main purpose of religion is not to provide a representation of the natural world, for if that were its basic task its persistence would be incomprehensible. In this respect it is scarcely more than a tissue of lies. But religion is above all a system of notions by which individuals imagine the society to

which they belong and their obscure yet intimate relations with that society. This is its primordial role; and although this representation is metaphorical and symbolic, it is not inaccurate. Quite the contrary, it fully expresses the most essential aspect of the relations between the individual and society. For it is an eternal truth that something exists outside us that is greater than we are, and with which we commune.

That is why we can be sure that acts of worship, whatever they might be, are not futile or meaningless gestures. By seeming to strengthen the ties between the worshipper and his god, they really strengthen the ties that bind the individual to his society, since god is merely the symbolic expression of society. It is possible that the fundamental truth contained in religion might compensate for the secondary errors it entails, so that despite the mistakes caused by these errors, the faithful could not leave religion behind. More often than not the recipes religion prescribed must have been ineffective. But these failures could not have been very influential because they did not affect the essential elements of religion.¹

Still, the objection will be raised that even in this hypothesis religion is the product of a kind of delirium. What other name can we give to the burst of emotion in which men find themselves when, as the result of a collective effervescence, they believe they have been swept up into a world quite different from the one they see?

It is true that religious life cannot reach a certain degree of intensity without involving a psychic exaltation that is in some way akin to delirium. For this reason prophets, founders of religions, great saints—men with an unusually sensitive religious consciousness—very often show signs of excessive and even pathological excitability. These physiological defects predispose them to great religious roles. The ritual use of intoxicating liquor can be explained in the same way. Ardent faith is not necessarily the fruit of drunkenness and mental disorder; but as people soon learned from experience that the mentality of the delirious was similar to that of the prophet, they sought to clear the way for prophecy by artificially provoking delirium. But while we can say that religion is accompanied by a certain delirium, it must be added that this delirium, caused in this

¹ Since we will return to this idea and argue the case more explicitly when we deal with rites (Book III), we will confine ourselves for now to this general statement.

way, is *well founded*. The images that induce it are not pure illusions, as the naturists and animists would have it; they correspond to something in the real world. The nature of the moral forces they express is such that they may be unable to affect the human mind intensely without sweeping it away and plunging it into a so-called *ecstatic* state, provided the word is used in its etymological sense; it does not follow, however, that these forces are imaginary. Quite the contrary, the mental excitement they arouse attests to their reality. It is simply additional proof that a very intense social life always does some violence to the body and mind of the individual, disturbing their normal functioning; hence it can last for only a very limited time.¹

Moreover, if we use the word 'delirium' for any state in which the mind adds to immediate sensation and projects its feelings and impressions onto things, perhaps there is no collective representation that is not delirious, in a sense; religious beliefs are only a particular case of a very general law. The whole social world seems populated by forces that in reality exist only in our mind. We know how the soldier feels about the flag, though it is merely a scrap of cloth. Human blood is just an organic liquid, yet even today we cannot see it spilled without feeling a violent emotion unwarranted by its biochemical properties. From the physical point of view, man is just a system of cells, from the mental point of view just a system of representations; from either perspective he differs from the animal only in degrees. And yet society regards him, and compels us to regard him, as endowed with a *sui generis* character that isolates and protects him from encroachments—that, in short, imposes respect. This status, which is unrivalled, seems to us one of his distinctive attributes, though it has no basis in the empirical nature of man. A cancelled postage stamp may be worth a fortune; clearly this value is not dictated by its natural properties. In a sense, our representation of the external world is no doubt also just a tissue of hallucinations: the smells, tastes, and colours that we attribute to bodies are not there, or at least not the way we perceive. Yet our sensations of smell, taste, and sight correspond to certain objective states of the things represented; in their way they express the properties of either material particles or movements of the ether that indeed have their

¹ Cf. Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés eskimos', *L'Année sociologique*, 9 (1906), 127.

origin in the bodies we perceive as fragrant, tasty, or colourful. But collective representations of things often attribute to them properties that are not inherent in any form or to any extent. They can turn the most ordinary object into a sacred and very powerful being.*

And yet, though purely ideal, the powers conferred operate as though they were real; they determine man's conduct as imperatively as physical forces. The Arunta who has properly rubbed himself with his *churinga* feels stronger; he is stronger. If he has eaten the flesh of a prohibited animal, though it may be perfectly healthy he will sicken and even die. The soldier who falls defending his flag surely does not believe he has sacrificed himself for a piece of cloth. Social thought, because of its imperative authority, has a power that individual thought cannot have; by acting on our minds it makes us see things in whatever light it chooses; it adds to or subtracts from the real according to the circumstances. So there is a region of nature in which the formula of idealism is applied nearly to the letter: that is the social realm. There, far more than elsewhere, the idea creates the reality. Even in this case, idealism is probably not true without qualification. We can never escape the duality of our nature and completely transcend physical necessities. As we will soon show, in order to express our own ideas to ourselves we need to anchor them in material things that symbolize them. But here the role of matter is minimal. The object that supports the idea is trivial compared to the ideal superstructure that subsumes it, and, moreover, it has nothing to do with that superstructure. This is the substance of the pseudo-delirium encountered at the basis of so many collective representations: it is only a form of this fundamental idealism.¹ So it is not strictly speaking a delirium; for the ideas objectified in this way are solidly grounded, not in the material things onto which they are grafted, but in the nature of society.

¹ We see what is wrong with theories like Ratzel's geographic materialism (see notably his *Politische Geographie* (Leipzig: R. Oldenbourg, 1897)), which would derive all of social life from its material substratum (whether economic or territorial). Their error is comparable to Maudsley's in individual psychology. Just as he reduced the psychic life of the individual to a mere epiphenomenon of its physiological base, these theories would reduce the psychic life of the collectivity to its physical base. This ignores the fact that ideas are realities, forces, and that collective representations are forces even more active and powerful than individual representations. On this point see Durkheim, 'Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives'.

We can now understand how the totemic principle, and more generally every religious force, is external to the things it inhabits, for the notion is not composed of the impressions the thing produces directly on our mind and senses. Religious force is the feeling the collectivity inspires in its members, but projected outside and objectified by the minds that feel it. It becomes objectified by being anchored in an object which then becomes sacred, but any object can play this role. In principle, none is predestined by its nature to the exclusion of others, any more than others are precluded. It all depends on the circumstances that cause the feeling generating religious ideas to alight here or there, in this place rather than that. Hence the sacred character that garbs a thing is not implicated in its intrinsic features, *it is added to them*. The world of the religious is not a particular aspect of empirical nature: *it is superimposed*.

This idea of the religious allows us to explain an important principle found at the basis of many myths and rites, and which can be articulated as follows: when a sacred being is subdivided, it remains entirely equal to itself in each of its parts. In other words, in religious thought the part is equal to the whole; it has the same powers, the same efficacy. A fragment of a relic has the same virtues as the whole relic. The smallest drop of blood contains the same active principle as all the blood. The soul, as we shall see, can be broken up into nearly as many parts as there are organs or tissues in the body; each of these partial souls is equivalent to the whole. This idea would be incomprehensible if sacredness were inherent in the constitutive properties of the thing that serves as its substratum; for then it would change like the thing itself, increasing and decreasing with it. But if its virtues are not intrinsic to it but arise from certain feelings it reawakens and symbolizes—even if such feelings originate outside it—it will have the same value, whether whole or not, since it needs no fixed dimensions to play this evocative role. Since the part recalls the whole, it also evokes the feelings recalled by the whole. A small scrap of the flag represents the country as much as the flag itself, and it is by rights just as sacred.¹

¹ This principle has passed from religion into magic. It is the alchemists' *totum ex parte*.

V

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

It is obvious that for any kind of group an emblem is a useful rallying point. Expressing social unity in a material form makes it more tangible to everyone; for this reason the use of emblematic symbols must have quickly spread once the idea took shape. Moreover, this idea must have sprung spontaneously from the conditions of common life, for the emblem is not only a convenient method of clarifying society's awareness of itself, it actually creates this feeling: it is a basic element of this feeling.

On their own, individual consciousnesses are effectively closed to one another; they can communicate only by signs that translate their inner states. For the exchange between them to end in communion—that is, in a fusion of all individual feelings into a common feeling—the signs expressing those feelings must merge into a single outcome. The appearance of this outcome notifies individuals that they are in unison and makes them aware of their moral unity. By shouting the same cry, pronouncing the same words, making the same gesture to the same object, they become and feel as one. To be sure, individual representations also have organic consequences that are not unimportant; yet such representations can be conceptualized as distinct from those physical repercussions that accompany or follow them but do not constitute them.

Collective representations are quite another matter. They presuppose that consciousnesses act on and react to one another; they are the result of these actions and reactions, which are possible only through tangible intermediaries. These intermediaries, then, not only reveal the mental state associated with them, they contribute to creating it. Individual minds can meet and commune only on condition that they come out of themselves; but they can do this only through movements. It is the homogeneity of these movements that

makes the group aware of itself and so brings it into being. Once this homogeneity is established and these movements have taken a form and a stereotypical configuration, they symbolize the corresponding representations, but only because they have combined to form them.

Without symbols, moreover, social feelings could only have a precarious existence. Those feelings are very strong while men are assembled and subject to mutual influence, but they survive later only in the form of memories that gradually fade if left to themselves. Since the group is no longer present and active, individual temperaments easily take over again. The violent passions that could be unleashed in the midst of a crowd subside and expire once it is dissolved, and individuals are amazed that they could let themselves be so carried away. But if the movements by which these feelings were expressed are inscribed on lasting things, then they become lasting themselves. These things perpetually call these feelings to mind and keep them alive, as if their initial cause were still operating. Thus while creating emblems is necessary for society to become aware of itself, it is no less indispensable to assure the continuity of this awareness.

So we must guard against seeing these symbols as mere artifice—labels added to ready-made representations to make them more manageable. They are integral to those representations. Even the fact that collective feelings are attached in this way to foreign things is not purely a matter of convention; it tangibly embodies a real feature of social phenomena, namely their transcendence of individual consciousness. Indeed, we know that social phenomena arise not in the individual but in the group. Whatever part we play in their creation, each of us receives them from the outside.¹ When we imagine them as emanating from a material object, we are not entirely wrong about their nature. Although they do not come from the specific thing to which we attribute them, they do originate outside us. If the moral force that sustains the worshipper does not come from the idol he worships, from the emblem he venerates, it is none the less external to him and he feels this. The objectivity of the symbol merely expresses this exteriority.

Social life, then, in every aspect and throughout its history, is possible only thanks to a vast body of symbolism. The material

¹ On this point see Durkheim, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique*, 5 ff.

emblems, the embodied representations with which we are especially concerned in the present study, are a particular form of that symbolism. But there are many others. Collective feelings can be embodied equally in personalities or formulas: some formulas are flags; some personalities, real or mythic, are symbols. But there is a kind of emblem that must have appeared very early, quite apart from calculation or reflection, and we have seen it play a considerable role in totemism—namely tattooing. Well-known facts demonstrate that under certain conditions it is produced automatically. When men of a lower culture share a common life, they are often led instinctively to paint or engrave on their bodies images that recall this communal existence. According to a text by Procopius, the first Christians imprinted the name of Christ or the sign of the cross on their skin.¹ For a long time, groups of pilgrims on their way to Palestine also tattooed designs on their arms or wrists representing the cross or the monogram of Christ. When twenty young men from an Italian high school were about to separate, they decorated themselves with tattoos that in various ways represented the years they had spent together. The same practice has often been observed among soldiers in the same company, sailors on the same ship, and prisoners in the same detention facility. It is understandable that especially where technology is still rudimentary, tattooing is the most direct and expressive means by which the communion of minds can be affirmed. The best way of attesting to oneself and to others that we are part of the same group is to imprint the same distinctive mark on the body. And proof that this is the reason for the totemic image is that, as we have shown, it is not an attempt to reproduce the appearance of the thing it is meant to represent. It is composed of lines and dots which are given an entirely conventional meaning. The purpose is not to embody and evoke a particular object, but to bear witness that a certain number of individuals share the same moral life.

The clan, then, is a society that is less able than others to do without emblems and symbols, for there are few societies so lacking in cohesion. The clan cannot be defined by its leader, for although central authority is not entirely absent, it is at most uncertain and unstable. Furthermore, the clan cannot be defined by the territory it

¹ Procopius of Gaza, *Commentarii in Isaiam*, 496. [Durkheim may have taken the 5th-century reference from *Procopii Gazaei . . . opera omnia in unum corpus adunata* (Petit Montrouge: J. P. Migne, 1861).]

occupies, since its nomadic population¹ is not closely attached to a particular locality. [. . .] The unity of the group is palpable, then, only because of the collective name borne by its members, and the equally collective emblem representing the thing designated by this name. A clan is essentially a union of individuals bearing the same name who rally around the same sign. Take away the name and the sign that makes it tangible, and the clan can no longer even be imagined. Since the clan was possible only under these conditions, we understand why the emblem was instituted and the place it holds in the life of the group.

Still, we must discover why these names and these emblems were borrowed almost exclusively from the world of animals and plants, but mainly from the first.

It seems likely that the emblem played a more important role than the name. In any case, today the written sign still has a more central place in the life of the clan than the spoken sign. Now, the emblematic image called for something that could be embodied by a drawing. In addition, this had to be something with which the men of the clan were in close and habitual contact. Animals met this requirement best. For hunting and fishing peoples, animals were in fact the essential elements of the economic environment. In this connection, plants came only later, for they hold only a secondary place in the diet when they are not cultivated. Moreover, the animal is more closely associated with man's life than the plant, if only because of the natural kinship that unites these two beings. By contrast, the sun, moon, and stars were too far away and seemed to come from another world. Besides, as long as the constellations were not distinct and classified, the starry sky did not offer enough clearly differentiated things to serve as designations for all the clans and all the subclans of a tribe. [. . .] By contrast, animals and plants were perfect. [. . .]

VI

This theory of totemism gives us the key to a curious feature of human mentality that, if more marked in former times than it is

¹ At least in Australia. In America, the population is in general sedentary, but the clan in America is a relatively advanced form of organization.

today, has still not disappeared and has in any case played a significant role in the history of thought. This offers yet another occasion to observe that logical evolution is closely tied to religious evolution and depends, like it, on social conditions.

If there is one truth that seems self-evident to us today it is that beings who differ not only in their outward appearance but in their most fundamental features—such as minerals, plants, animals, and men—cannot be considered equivalent and interchangeable. [. . .] But these distinctions, which seem so natural to us, are not at all primitive. Originally, all realms of being are fused. Rocks have a gender and the power to engender; the sun, moon, and stars are men or women who experience and express human feelings, just as men are pictured as animals or plants. [. . .]

That the anthropomorphic instinct with which the animists have endowed the primitive cannot account for this mentality is demonstrated by the nature of its characteristic confusions. These confusions arise, indeed, not because man has wildly extended the human realm to include all others, but because he has mingled the most disparate realms. He has no more imagined the world in his image than he has imagined himself in the image of the world: in fact, he has done both at once. In his idea of things he certainly included human elements; but he also included elements of things in his idea of himself.

Yet there was nothing in experience that might have suggested these yokings and mixings. Observation tells us that everything is diverse and discontinuous. Nowhere in reality do we see beings merge their natures and transform into one another. Therefore an exceptionally powerful cause must have intervened to transfigure the real, making it appear as something other than itself.

The agent of this transfiguration was religion. Religious beliefs substituted a different world for the world perceived by the senses, as the case of totemism demonstrates. The fundamental element of this religion is that members of the clan and the various beings represented by the totemic emblem are regarded as sharing the same essence. Once this belief was accepted, a bridge was built between these disparate realms. Man was represented as a kind of animal or plant, plants and animals as kin to man—or rather, all those beings, perceived as distinct, were conceived as sharing a common nature. And this remarkable aptitude for mingling what seems to us

so obviously distinct arises from the fact that the first forces with which human intelligence peopled the universe were elaborated by religion. [. . .]

We know, moreover, that these religious conceptions are the product of specific social causes. Because the clan cannot exist without a name and an emblem, and because this emblem is always before the eyes of individuals, the feelings that society awakens in its members are focused on that emblem and on the objects it represents. Men were thus impelled to represent the collective force, whose power they felt, as species of the thing that served as the group's flag. So the most disparate realms were mingled in the notion of this force. In a sense, it was essentially human since it was constructed from human ideas and feelings; but at the same time it must have seemed closely linked to the animate or inanimate being that gave it outward form. The cause whose action we grasp here is not specific to totemism; there is no society in which it does not play an active part. Generally, a collective feeling can become self-conscious only by being anchored in a material object. But by that very fact it participates in the nature of that object, and vice versa. Thus social necessities have fused together notions that at first seemed distinct, and social life has facilitated this fusion by the great mental effervescence it stimulates.¹ This is new evidence that logical understanding is a function of society, since it adopts the forms and attitudes society imprints on it.

Granted, this logic is disconcerting. Still, we must refrain from belittling it: however crude it may seem, it was a supremely important contribution to the intellectual evolution of humanity. Indeed, it made possible the first explanation of the world. Of course, the mental habits it implies prevented man from seeing reality as apprehended by the senses; but as seen through the senses reality has the serious inconvenience of defying explanation. For to explain is to connect things to one another, to re-establish relations between them that make them appear to us as functions of one another, as vibrating

¹ One other cause accounts for a large part of this fusion: the extreme contagiousness of religious forces. They invade every object within their reach, whatever it is. So the same religious force can animate the most diverse things, which are thereby closely connected and classified in the same genus. We shall return to this contagiousness below, while showing that it has its social origins in the notion of the sacred (see Book III, Ch. 1).

sympathetically in accord with an internal law grounded in their nature. Now sensation, which only sees things from the outside, cannot help us to discover these relations and these internal bonds; the mind alone can create such a notion. When I learn that A regularly precedes B, my fund of knowledge is enriched by a new insight; my intelligence is not satisfied by a statement that does not include its own reasoning. I begin to *understand* only if it is possible to conceive of B from a perspective that links it in some way to A, joined to A by some relation of kinship. Religions have done a great service to thought by constructing a first representation of what these relations of kinship between things could be. Given the conditions under which it was tried, this enterprise could lead only to the most provisional outcomes.

But are the outcomes of this enterprise ever definitive? And is it not taken up again and again? Besides, it is less important to succeed than to dare. The crucial thing was not to let the mind submit to appearances but, on the contrary, to teach it to dominate them and bring together what the senses would keep apart. As soon as man sensed that internal connections between things exist, science and philosophy became possible. Religion cleared the way. But it could play this role because it is a social thing. To overrule the impressions of the senses and substitute for them a new way of imagining the real, a new kind of thought had to be created—collective thought. Only collective thought could do this: creating a whole world of ideas that seemed to transfigure the world of sensate realities required an overstimulation of intellectual forces that was possible only in and through society.

And this mentality is hardly unrelated to our own. Our logic is born of this logic. The explanations of contemporary science are more certain of being objective because they are more systematic and based on more strictly controlled observations, but they are not inherently different from those that satisfy primitive thought. Today as in the past, to explain is to show how a thing participates in another or several other things. It is said that the participations postulated by mythologies violate the principle of contradiction and are therefore antithetical to scientific explanations.¹ To assert that a

¹ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris: Alcan, 1910), 77 ff.

man is a kangaroo, that the sun is a bird—is this not identifying one thing with another? But we do not think any differently when we say that heat is movement, that light is a vibration of the ether, and so on. Every time we yoke together heterogeneous terms by an internal bond, we are of necessity identifying contraries. The terms we yoke together in this way are not, of course, those the Australian brings together; we choose according to other criteria and for other reasons. But the same method by which the mind places things in relationship does not essentially differ.

To be sure, if primitive thought had the sort of general and systematic indifference to contradiction attributed to it,¹ it would contrast on this point—and contrast markedly—with modern thought, which is always careful to be consistent. But we do not believe it is possible to characterize the mentality of lower societies by a kind of unilateral and exclusive penchant for refusing to make distinctions. If the primitive mingles things we keep distinct, conversely, he keeps apart things we yoke together, and he even conceives of these distinctions as violent and clear-cut oppositions. Between two beings classified in two different phratries, there is not only separation but antagonism. For this reason, the same Australian who mingles the sun and white cockatoos, opposes white cockatoos to black ones, regarding these as contraries. He perceives them as issuing from two separate genera that have nothing in common. There is a still more marked opposition between sacred and profane things. They repel and contradict each other with such force that the mind refuses to think of them at the same time. They exclude one another from consciousness.

There is no gulf, then, between the logic of religious thought and the logic of scientific thought. Both are made up of the same essential elements, although these elements are unequally and differently developed. [. . .]

¹ Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales*, 79.

CHAPTER 8

THE NOTION OF SOUL

IN the previous chapters we studied the basic principles of totemic religion. We could see that it contains no idea of soul, spirit, or mythic personality. Yet although the notion of spiritual beings is not fundamental to totemism, and so to religious thought in general, there is no religion from which this notion is absent. It is important, then, to discover how it took shape. To be certain that it is the product of a secondary formation, we must establish how it is derived from the more fundamental concepts we have previously articulated and explained.

Among spiritual beings, there is one that comes to our attention first because it is the prototype on which the others were built, and that is the soul.

I

Just as there is no known society without religion, so there is no religion, however crudely organized, in which we do not find a whole system of collective representations related to the soul, its origin, and its fate. If we can judge from the ethnographic data, the idea of soul seems to have been contemporary with humanity. Indeed all its basic features seem to have been so fixed from the start that the work of the most advanced religions and philosophy was essentially to refine it without adding anything truly essential. All Australian societies grant that every human body shelters an inner being, the animating principle of life that is the soul. True, women are often the exception to the general rule—there are tribes in which they are thought to have no soul. If Dawson is to be believed, the same is true of young children in the tribes he observed.¹ But these are exceptional cases, and probably late developments.² Dawson's

¹ James Dawson, *Australian Aborigines* (Melbourne: G. Robinson, 1881), 51.

² Among the Gnanji there was certainly a time when women had a soul; for still today there are a great number of female souls. However, they are never reincarnated; and since among these people the soul that animates a newborn is an older soul becoming

observation even seems suspect, and may well be due to a misinterpretation of the facts.

It is not easy to determine the Australian's idea of the soul, since it is so vague and hidden. This is not surprising. If we asked our contemporaries—even those who believe most firmly in its existence—how they imagine the soul, their answers would not be much more coherent or precise. For we are dealing with an extremely complex notion that involves many poorly analysed feelings that were elaborated over centuries without much awareness. Yet here are the most fundamental, if often contradictory, features by which that notion is defined.

In some cases, we are told that the soul shares the external appearance of the body. But we are also told that it is the size of a grain of sand, so small that it can pass through the smallest crevices and cracks. We shall see that it is conceived simultaneously in the form of animal species. In other words, its form is essentially inconsistent and unstable; it changes from one moment to the next at the whim of circumstance, according to the demands of myth and rite. Its substance is no less vague. It is not immaterial since it has a form, however indefinite. And indeed, even during this life it has physical needs: it eats and, conversely, it can be eaten. It may leave the body and in the course of its travels it may feed on foreign souls. Once it is completely released from the body, it is presumed to lead a life quite similar to the one it led on this earth: drinking, eating, hunting, and so on. [. . .] It is imagined to be made of infinitely rare and subtle matter, as something ethereal like a shadow or breath.

It is distinct from and independent of the body because from the beginning of life, it can leave for brief periods. [. . .] This distinction and independence manifest themselves most clearly in death. While the body no longer exists, leaving no visible traces, the soul continues to live; it leads an autonomous existence in another world.

reincarnate, women cannot have a soul. Moreover, we can explain the origins of this absence of reincarnation. Among the Gnanji, filiation, having once been uterine, is through the paternal line today: the mother does not transmit her totem to the child. The woman, therefore, never has descendants who perpetuate her; she is *finis familiae suae* [the last of her family]. To explain this situation, there were two possible hypotheses: either women have no soul, or else the souls of women are destroyed after death. The Gnanji adopted the first of these two explanations; certain Queensland peoples have preferred the second (see Walter Edmund Roth, 'Superstition, Magic and Medicine', *North Queensland Ethnography*, 5/58 (Brisbane: G. A. Vaughn, 1903)).

But as real as this duality may be, it is not absolute. It would be a misconception to represent the body as a kind of habitat in which the soul resides but with which it has only external connections. Quite the contrary, the soul is joined to the body by the closest bonds, and is only uneasily and imperfectly separated from it. [. . .]

There is not only a close connection between the soul and the body, but a partial mingling. Just as there is something of the body in the soul, since it sometimes reproduces its form, there is something of the soul in the body. Certain regions and bodily products are regarded as having a special affinity for the soul: the heart, the breath, the placenta, the blood, the shadow, the liver, the fat of the liver, the kidneys, and so on. These disparate material substrates are not simply the habitats of the soul, they are the soul itself seen from the outside. When blood is spilled, the soul escapes with it. The soul is not in the breath, it is the breath. It is one with the body in which it resides. Hence the idea that man has a number of different souls. Dispersed throughout the body, the soul is differentiated and fragmented. In a sense each organ contains an individualized portion of the soul which has thus become a distinct entity. The heart's portion could not be the same as that of the breath or the shadow or the placenta. Although they are all related, they must be distinguished and even bear different names.

Moreover, if the soul is more densely located at certain points of the body, it is not absent from others. It is diffused to varying degrees throughout the entire body. This is quite evident in funeral rites. [. . .] By gestures and expressive movements, the participants invite the soul to depart. Paths and exits are cleared for it so that it may fly away more easily. For it has not left the body in one piece; it permeated the body too thoroughly to disengage all at once. So we find the common funeral rite of anthropophagy: the flesh of the dead man is eaten because a sacred principle is held to reside in it, which is none other than the soul. [. . .] A time comes, however, when the final separation is accomplished and the liberated soul takes flight. [. . .]

It goes off to the land of souls. This land is conceived differently by the various tribes; sometimes we even find different conceptions coexisting side by side in the same society. Among some tribes it is situated underground, and each totemic group has its own. [. . .] Elsewhere, all the dead, whatever their totems, are regarded as living

together in the same vague location beyond the sea, on an island or on the shores of a lake. And sometimes souls are thought to go to the heavens beyond the clouds. [. . .]

In general, all souls have the same fate and lead the same life. Yet they may be treated differently depending on the way they lived on earth, and we catch a glimpse of a first draft of these distinct and even opposed compartments into which the world beyond will later be divided. The souls of those who excelled as hunters, warriors, dancers, and so on during their lives do not mingle with the crowd of others; a special place is set aside for them, sometimes the heavens. Strehlow even reports that, according to one myth, the souls of bad people are devoured by dreaded spirits and annihilated. However, these conceptions remain quite vague in Australia;¹ they begin to take on a touch of definition and clarity only in more advanced societies, such as those of America.

II

In their most primitive form and reduced to their most basic features, then, these are the beliefs relating to the nature of the soul and its destiny. We must now try to account for them. What is it that led man to imagine there were two beings inside him, one having these special features? To answer this question, let us begin by trying to discover what origin the primitive himself ascribes to the spiritual principle he feels inside him. Properly analysed, his own conception will point the way to our answer.

Following our method, we shall study the ideas in question in a specific group of societies in which they have been observed with particular precision, namely the tribes of central Australia. Our area of observation, although extensive, will therefore be limited. But there is reason to believe that these same ideas, in disparate forms, are or have been generally widespread, even outside Australia. Furthermore, and above all, the notion of soul is not distinctly different in these central tribes from what it is in other Australian societies; it has the same basic features everywhere. Since the same effect always has the same cause, there is reason to think that this notion, which is

¹ Sometimes the missionaries' influence is evident. Dawson speaks to us of a regular hell as opposed to paradise, and tends to see this conception as a European import.

everywhere identical, is not caused by different things in different places. So the origin we attribute to it after studying the tribes in question here ought to be considered equally true for others. These tribes will offer us occasion to do a kind of experiment whose results, like those of any well-done experiment, can be generalized. The homogeneity of Australian civilization would be enough in itself to justify this generalization; but we will take care to test it as well against data taken from other peoples in both Australia and America.

Since the ideas that provide the basis for our demonstration were reported differently by Spencer and Gillen and by Strehlow, we should present both versions sequentially. We shall see that, interpreted properly, they differ more in form than in content, and that in the end they have the same sociological significance.

According to Spencer and Gillen, the souls that come in every generation to animate the bodies of newborns are not special and original creations. All these tribes would agree that there is a finite stock of souls that are reincarnated periodically and cannot be increased in number even by one. When an individual dies, his soul leaves the body where it was living, and, once mourning is over, it goes to the land of souls. But at the end of a certain period it returns to incarnate itself anew, and it is these reincarnations that generate conceptions and births. These basic souls are the same ones that animated the founding ancestors of the clan at the very beginning of things. In a certain epoch, considered the very beginning of time—and impossible to imagine—there were beings who did not derive from others. For this reason the Arunta calls them the *Aljirangamitjina*, the uncreated, those who exist from all eternity; and according to Spencer and Gillen, the Arunta would give the name *Alcheringa* to the period in which these fabulous beings are thought to have lived.* Organized in totemic clans, like the men of today, they spent their time travelling and performing all sorts of heroic deeds commemorated in myths. But a moment came when this terrestrial life ended. Separately or by groups, they vanished into the ground. Their bodies changed into trees or rocks that are still seen in the places where they supposedly vanished underground. But their souls endure, immortal. They even continue to frequent the places where the existence of their first hosts came to an end. Furthermore, these places have a sacred character because of the memories attached to them; it is in these places that the *oknanikilla* are found, those

sanctuaries where the *churinga* of the clan are kept, and which are in effect the centres of the various totemic cults. When one of the souls wandering around one of these sanctuaries enters the body of a woman, conception is the result, and later birth. Each individual is therefore considered a new avatar of a specific ancestor: he is that very ancestor, reappearing in a new body and with new features. Now, who were these ancestors?

First of all, they were endowed with powers infinitely superior to those that men possess today, even the most respected elders and renowned magicians. They were thought to have virtues we might qualify as miraculous. [. . .]

In the second place, these ancestors were not men, in the proper sense of the word, but animals or plants, or even mixed beings in which the animal or vegetable element was dominant. [. . .] Their souls, which endure for ever, are of the same nature; in them, too, the human and animal elements are wedded, with a certain tendency of the second to predominate. Thus they are made of the same substance as the totemic principle, for we know that the chief feature of this principle is its dual aspect, synthesizing and commingling two realms within itself.

Since no other souls exist, we must conclude that the soul, in a general way, is none other than the totemic principle incarnate in each individual. And there is nothing surprising in this derivation. We already know that the totemic principle is immanent in each member of the clan. But by entering into individuals, it is inevitable that it becomes individualized itself. Because the consciousnesses it merges with differ from one another, it is differentiated in their image; since each consciousness has its own features, the totemic principle takes on distinctive features in each one. It remains an external and alien force in itself; but the portion that each man is thought to possess is bound to develop close affinities with the particular subject in which it resides. The totemic principle participates in the nature of that subject, becoming that nature to some degree. Thus it has two contradictory qualities, whose coexistence is one of the distinctive features of the notion of soul.

Now as in the past, the soul is that which is best and deepest in ourselves, the pre-eminent portion of our being; and yet it is also a temporary guest that has come to us from outside, lives an existence in us distinct from that of the body, and must one day reclaim its

independence. In a word, just as society exists in and through individuals, the soul lives only in and through individual consciousnesses whose association forms the clan. If they did not feel the totemic principle inside them, it would not exist; it is they who put it into things. So by necessity it must be shared and fragmented among them. Each of these fragments is a soul. [. . .]

This conclusion, however, presupposes that these tribes believe in the doctrine of reincarnation. Yet according to Strehlow, that doctrine is unknown among the Arunta, the society that Spencer and Gillen studied longest and most thoroughly. If in this particular case those two observers were mistaken, their entire testimony ought to be considered suspect. It is therefore important to determine the real extent of this divergence. In reality, Strehlow's version differs from Spencer and Gillen's only in the literal detail of formulas and symbols: it is the same mythic theme in variant forms.

In the first place, all these observers agree in seeing every conception as the product of an incarnation. Only according to Strehlow what is incarnate is not a soul but a *ratapa* or a *namatuna*. And what is a *ratapa*? Strehlow says it is a complete embryo, made of both body and soul. But the soul is always represented in material forms; since it sleeps, dances, hunts, eats, and so on, it must include a bodily element. Conversely, the *ratapa* is not visible to ordinary people; no one sees it when it enters the body of the woman; this means that it is made of matter quite comparable to that of the soul. In this respect, then, it does not seem possible to differentiate them clearly from one another. These are, in sum, mythic beings that are conceived more or less on the same model. [. . .] Moreover, like the soul, the *ratapa* sustains the closest relations with the ancestor whose materialized form is the tree or the sacred rock. It has the same totem as this ancestor, belongs to the same phratry and the same matrimonial class. Its place in the social framework of the tribe is exactly the one the ancestor is thought to have held in the past. It bears the same name. Here is proof that these two personalities are at the least closely related to one another.

There is more: this kinship goes as far as complete identification. Indeed, the *ratapa* was formed on the mystical body of the ancestor; it comes from it, like a piece that has become detached. In short, some part of the ancestor enters the mother's breast and becomes the child. And so we return to Spencer and Gillen's idea: birth is due to

the incarnation of an ancestral figure. Of course it is not the whole figure that becomes incarnate but merely an emanation of it. But the difference is not the main point, since when a sacred being divides and doubles, every fragment into which it is divided has all its essential traits. The Alcheringa ancestor, then, is basically contained whole in the element of himself that becomes a *ratapa*. [. . .]

For Strehlow, then, as for Spencer and Gillen, there is a religious, mystical principle in every newborn that emanates from an Alcheringa ancestor. It is this principle that forms the essence of each individual—his soul; or at any rate his soul is made of the same matter and substance. Now, this basic fact is our sole evidence for discovering the nature and origin of the idea of soul. The various metaphors by which it was expressed are only of secondary interest to us.¹ [. . .]

The ideas of totem and ancestor are so close that sometimes they seem to overlap. Thus, after speaking to us of the maternal totem, or *altjira*, Strehlow adds: "This *altjira* appears to the blacks in dreams and utters warnings, just as it takes news of them to their sleeping friends." This *altjira* that speaks, that is personally attached to every individual, is obviously an ancestor; and yet it is also an incarnation of the totem. [. . .] It seems, then, that the totem is sometimes imagined as a collection of ideal beings, mythic figures who are more or less indistinguishable from the ancestors. In short, the ancestors are fragments of the totem.³

But while the ancestor overlaps with the totemic being to this extent, the soul of the individual that is so close to the ancestral soul must overlap as well. Moreover, this turns out to be equally true for the close ties that unite every man to his *churinga*. We know, in fact, that the *churinga* expresses the personality of the individual who is

¹ Basically, the only real difference between Strehlow on the one hand, and Spencer and Gillen on the other, is the following. For Spencer and Gillen, after death the soul of the individual returns to the nanja tree where it mingles once again with the soul of the ancestor (*Native Tribes*, 513). For Strehlow, it goes off to the island of the dead where it vanishes. In both myths, it does not survive individually. We refuse to deal with the cause of this divergence. It is possible that Spencer and Gillen made a mistake in observation when they fail to speak of the island of the dead. It is also possible that the myth is not the same among the Arunta of the east whom Spencer and Gillen mainly observed, and in other parts of the tribe.

² Strehlow, *Aranda*, ii. 57 and i. 2.

³ In other words, the totemic species is constituted more by the group of ancestors and by the mythic species than by the animal or plant species itself.

thought to be born of it; but it also expresses the totemic animal. When the civilizing hero Mangarkunjerkunja gave a personal *churinga* to each member of the Kangaroo clan, he spoke these words: 'Here is the body of a kangaroo.'¹ So the *churinga* is at once the body of the ancestor, of the individual now present, and of the totemic animal. These three beings form, in Strehlow's powerful and apt expression, 'an integral unity'.² These terms are to some extent equivalent and interchangeable. That is, they are conceived as different aspects of one and the same reality, which is equally defined by the distinctive attributes of the totem. Their common essence is the totemic principle. And language itself expresses this identity. [. . .]

III

It is true that in the material presented above, the doctrine of reincarnation was studied only in the tribes of central Australia; the bases for our inference might therefore be judged too narrow. But first, for reasons already explained, the experiment has a scope that extends beyond the societies we have directly observed. Furthermore, there is abundant evidence establishing that the same or analogous ideas are encountered in the most far-flung parts of Australia or have, at least, left clear traces. They are found even as far away as America. [. . .]

Among the Tlinkit, according to Krause, souls of the departed are thought to return to earth to enter the bodies of pregnant women in their family. 'So when a woman dreams of a deceased relative during her pregnancy, she believes that the soul of this person has entered into her. If the newborn shows some characteristic mark that the deceased possessed, it is thought that he is the deceased himself, returned to earth, and he is given this person's name.'³ This belief is just as widespread among the Haida. It is the shaman who reveals the identity of the relative who is reincarnated in the child, and consequently what name this child should bear. Among the Kwakiutl they believe that the last to die returns to life in the person of the first child born to the family. The same is true among the Huron, the Iroquois, the Tinneh, and many other tribes of the United States.

¹ Strehlow, *Aranda*, ii. 76.

² *Ibid.*

³ Aurel Krause, *Die Tlinkit-Indianer* (Jena: J. Constable, 1885), 282.

The commonality of these ideas naturally extends to the conclusion we have deduced from them: our proposed explanation for the idea of the soul. Its general scope is, moreover, confirmed by the following facts.

We know that every individual harbours inside him something of the anonymous force that pervades the sacred species—he is himself a member of that species. But not as an empirical and palpable being. For in spite of the symbolic designs and marks with which he decorates his body, nothing about him suggests the form of an animal or plant. There is another being inside him in whom he recognizes himself but whom he none the less imagines as a kind of animal or plant. Is it not obvious that this double must be the soul, since the soul itself is a double of the subject it animates? Final proof of this identity is that the organs most prominently embodying every individual's fragment of the totemic principle are also where the soul resides. Take the blood, for example. The blood contains something of the totemic essence, as witness the role it plays in totemic ceremonies. At the same time, blood is one of the seats of the soul; or rather it is the soul itself seen from the outside. When blood is spilled, the soul escapes. Hence it overlaps with the sacred principle that is immanent in the blood. [. .]

But here are more conclusive facts. If the soul is merely the totemic principle individualized, in some cases it must sustain fairly close relations with the animal or plant species whose form the totem replicates. And indeed, 'the Gewwe-Gal (a tribe of New South Wales) believe that each person has within himself an affinity for the spirit of some bird, beast, or reptile. It is not that the individual is thought to be descended from that animal, but that a kinship is thought to exist between the spirit that animates the man and the spirit of the animal.'¹ [. .]

IV

The idea of soul is a particular application of beliefs relating to sacred beings. In this way we have an explanation for the religious character this idea has displayed since it first appeared in history and still preserves today. The soul has always been considered something

¹ Fison and Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, 280.

sacred; as such it is opposed to the body, which in itself is profane. The soul is distinguished not only from its material envelope, as inside is distinguished from outside; it is not simply imagined as made of a more subtle and fluid material; but in addition it inspires something of those feelings that are always reserved for the divine. If it is not turned into a god, at least it is seen to have a spark of divinity. This fundamental feature would be inexplicable if the idea of soul were merely a pre-scientific solution to the problem of the dream: since there is nothing in the dream that might arouse religious emotion, the cause attributed to it could not be otherwise. But if the soul is part of the divine substance, it represents in us something other than ourselves; if it is made of the same mental material as sacred beings, it is natural that it should be the object of the same feelings.

The character that man ascribes to himself, then, is not pure illusion. Like the notion of religious force and divinity, the notion of soul is not without reality. It is quite true that we are formed of two distinct and opposite parts, like the sacred and the profane, and in a sense we can say that there is something of the divine in us. For society, that unique source of all that is sacred, is not restricted to moving us from the outside and having only a transitory effect; it is organized within us in a lasting way. It arouses in us a whole world of ideas and feelings that express it but which, at the same time, form an integral and permanent part of ourselves. When the Australian leaves a religious ceremony, the representations that common life has awakened or reawakened in him do not vanish at once. The figures of great ancestors, the heroic exploits which the rites commemorate, the great things of all sorts in which the cult has allowed him to participate—in short, the various ideas he has elaborated collectively—continue to live in his consciousness. And, through the emotions attached to them and by the special influence they exert, they are clearly distinguished from ordinary impressions made by his daily dealings with external things.

Moral ideas have the same character. It is society that has imprinted them in us, and since the respect it inspires is naturally attached to all that flows from it, the imperative norms of conduct are, by reason of their origin, invested with an authority and status that our other internal states do not have. And we assign them a separate place in our psychic life. Although our moral conscience is

part of our consciousness, we do not feel on an equal footing with it. We cannot recognize our own voice in this voice that makes itself heard only to us, giving orders to do some things and not others; the very tone in which it speaks to us announces that it expresses something inside us other than ourselves. This is the objective aspect of the idea of soul: the representations that are the fabric of our inner life are of two different and mutually exclusive kinds. One kind relates to the external and physical world, the other to an ideal world that we consider morally superior. We are thus really made of two beings who are oriented in divergent and virtually opposite directions, one of which dominates the other. Such is the underlying meaning of the antithesis that all peoples have more or less clearly conceived between the body and the soul, between the sensate being and the spiritual being that coexist within us. Moralists and preachers have often held that we cannot deny the reality and sacredness of duty without falling into materialism. And indeed, if we did not have the notion of moral and religious imperatives,¹ our psychic life would be flat, all our states of consciousness would be on the same level, and all feeling of duality would evaporate. Of course, to make this duality intelligible, it is not necessary to imagine some mysterious and unrepresentable substance opposed to the body called 'soul'. But here, as with the notion of the sacred, the error is in the literal character of the symbol employed, not in the reality of the fact symbolized. It is still true that our nature is double; there is truly a portion of divinity in us because we each contain a portion of those high ideals that are the soul of the collectivity.

The individual soul is therefore only a fragment of the group's collective soul; it is the anonymous force at the basis of the cult, but incarnate in the individual and wedded to his personality; it is *mana* individualized. The dream may well have contributed to certain secondary aspects of the idea. The inconsistency and instability of the

¹ If religious and moral imperatives constitute, as we believe, the essential elements of the idea of soul, we do not mean that these are the only elements involved. Other states of consciousness that have the same character, though to a lesser degree, cluster around this central core. This is true of all the higher forms of intellectual life, due to the special value and status society attributes to them. When we live the life of science or art, we feel we are moving in a circle of things above sensation; and incidentally, we shall have occasion to show this with more precision in our Conclusion. That is why the higher functions of the intelligence have always been considered specific manifestations of the activity of the soul. But they were probably not sufficient to form the notion of it.

images that occupy our minds during sleep, and their remarkable capacity to transform themselves into one another, may have provided the model of that subtle, diaphanous, and protean matter thought to constitute the soul. On the other hand, the facts of fainting, catalepsy, and so on may have suggested the idea that the soul was mobile and, beginning in this life, could leave the body for short periods; this in turn has been used to explain certain dreams. But all these experiences and observations could have had only an accessory and complementary influence which is even difficult to establish. What is truly essential to the notion comes from elsewhere.

But does this genesis of the idea of soul misconstrue its essential nature? If the soul is merely a particular form of the impersonal principle that permeates the group, the totemic species, and things of all kinds attached to them, it is itself basically impersonal. Therefore it must have more or less the same properties as the force of which it is merely a special mode—especially the same capacity to permeate, to spread contagiously, the same pervasiveness. Now, on the contrary, the soul is more easily imagined as a concrete, definite being, entirely self-enclosed and incommunicable to others; we make it the basis of our personality.

But this way of conceiving the soul is the product of a late philosophical elaboration. The popular representation, as it has spontaneously emerged from common experience, is very different, especially in the beginning. For the Australian, the soul is a very vague entity, taking unfixed and floating forms spread throughout the organism. Although it is more manifest at certain points of the body, there is perhaps none from which it is totally absent. Therefore it has a diffusion, a contagion, an omnipresence comparable to those of *mana*. Like *mana*, it can be divided and doubled infinitely while remaining complete in each of its parts; it is these divisions and these doublings that result in the plurality of souls. On the other hand, the doctrine of reincarnation, whose commonality we have established, shows how much impersonal elements enter into the idea of soul and how essential they are. For the same soul to take on a new personality in every generation, the individual forms in which it successively encloses itself must all be equally external and unattached to its true nature. It is a kind of generic substance that is individualized only secondarily and superficially. Moreover, this conception of the soul has not completely disappeared. The cult of relics demonstrates that

even today, for the majority of believers, the soul of a saint continues to adhere to his various bones with all its essential powers; which implies that it is imagined as capable of being diffused, subdivided, and incorporated simultaneously by all sorts of different things.

Just as we find in the soul the characteristic attributes of *mana*, secondary and superficial changes are enough for the *mana* to be individualized in the form of soul. [. . .] This is why we think that determining whether the *churinga* is sacred because it is the habitat of the soul, as Spencer and Gillen believe, or because it possesses impersonal virtues, as Strehlow thinks, is of little interest and no sociological importance. Whether the efficacy of a sacred object is imagined in an abstract form or attributed to some personal agency is not the main point. The psychological roots of both beliefs are identical: a thing is sacred because it inspires a collective feeling of respect that removes it from the realm of the profane. In order to explain this feeling, men sometimes relate it to a vague and imprecise cause, sometimes to a specific spiritual being endowed with a name and a history; but these different interpretations overlie a fundamental process that is the same in both cases.

This is what explains those extraordinary minglings we have encountered along the way. The individual, the soul of the ancestor he embodies or of which his soul is an emanation, his *churinga*, and the animals of the totemic species are, we said, in part equivalent and interchangeable. In certain respects, they affect the whole collective consciousness in the same way. If the *churinga* is sacred, it is because the totemic emblem engraved on its surface inspires collective feelings of respect. The same feeling is attached to the animals or plants whose outward form is replicated by the totem, to the soul of the individual since it is thought to be part of the totemic species, and finally to the ancestral soul of which the individual soul is merely a particular aspect. Thus all these disparate objects, real or ideal, have a common aspect by which they arouse the same affective state in consciousnesses, and thereby mingle. To the extent that they are expressed by one and the same representation, they are indistinguishable. This is how the Arunta could see the *churinga* as the body common to the individual, the ancestor, and even the totemic being. It is a way of expressing to himself that his feelings for these different things are identical.

However, while the idea of soul derives from the idea of *mana*, it

does not follow that the soul is a relatively late development, or that there was a historical period in which men knew religious forces only in their impersonal forms. [. . .] Just as there are no societies without individuals, impersonal forms that emerge from the collectivity cannot take shape without becoming incarnate in individual minds where they, too, are individualized. In reality these are not two different processes, but two different aspects of one and the same process. It is true that they are not equally important: one is more essential than the other. The idea of *mana* does not presuppose the idea of soul; for the *mana* to become individualized and fragmented in particular souls, it must first exist, and it does not intrinsically depend on the individualized forms it takes. On the other hand, the idea of soul can be understood only in relation to the idea of *mana*. As such, we can certainly say that it is a secondary formation, but a secondary formation in the logical, not the chronological, sense of the term.

V

How did men come to believe that the soul survived the body and could survive it indefinitely?

The conclusion from our analysis is that the belief in immortality was not in the least influenced by ideas about morality. Man did not imagine prolonging his existence beyond the grave so as to ensure just retribution for moral acts in another life, if not in this one. We have seen that any consideration of this kind was alien to the primitive notion of the beyond.

Nor is there any advantage in accepting the hypothesis that the other life was conceived as a means of escape from the agonizing thought of annihilation. First of all, the need for personal survival was hardly very strong in the beginning. The primitive generally accepts the idea of death with a sort of indifference. Raised to take little account of his individuality, accustomed to risking his life continually, he has little difficulty renouncing it. Moreover, the immortality promised him by the religions he practises is not personal. In a great many cases, the soul does not extend, or does not extend for long, the personality of the deceased since, forgetful of its previous existence, it goes off after some time to animate other bodies and thus becomes the animating principle of new personalities.

Even among more advanced peoples, this was not the colourless, sad existence led by the shades in She'ol or Erebus that could ease the regrets left by the memory of a lost life. [. . .]

What makes the question troublesome is that, in itself, the notion of soul did not imply the idea of survival but seemed rather to exclude it. Indeed, we have seen that the soul, while distinguished from the body, is thought to be closely allied to it. It ages when the body ages and reacts to all its ills; it must have seemed natural for the soul to die with the body. At the very least, the prevalent belief must have understood the soul to cease to exist the moment it had definitively lost its original form and nothing of what it had been remained. Yet at this very moment it is given the prospect of a new life.

The myths we previously reported provide us with the only possible explanation for this belief. We have seen that the souls of newborns were either emanations of ancestral souls or those same souls reincarnated. But either to become reincarnated or to release new emanations from time to time, they had to outlive their first custodians. It seems very likely, then, that the survival of the dead had to be accepted in order to explain the birth of the living. The primitive has no idea of an almighty god who draws souls out of nothingness. It seems to him that souls can come only from other souls. Those who are born can be only the new forms of those who once were; consequently, these must continue to exist in order for the others to take shape. In short, the belief in the immortality of souls is the only way man could explain to himself a fact that cannot have failed to attract his attention: the continuous life of the group. Individuals die, but the clan survives. The forces that feed its life must therefore have the same continuity. Now, these forces are the souls that animate individual bodies, but it is in and through them that the group is realized. For this reason they must endure. And while enduring, they must also remain the same; for as the clan always keeps its characteristic features, its spiritual substance must be conceived as qualitatively invariable. Since it is always the same clan with the same totemic principle, it must involve the same souls, souls being merely the totemic principle fragmented and particularized. It is like a mystical sort of germinating plasma that is transmitted from generation to generation and creates, or at least is thought to create, the spiritual unity of the clan over time. And despite its symbolic

character, this belief has a certain objective truth. For while the group is not immortal in the absolute sense of the word, it none the less outlives individuals and is reborn and reincarnated in every new generation. [. . .]

So the causes that prompted the first beliefs regarding another life were unrelated to the functions that posthumous institutions had to perform later on. But once born, these institutions were quickly enlisted to serve aims different from those that were their primary rationale. Starting with Australian societies, we see them beginning to coalesce to this end. Furthermore, to do this they had no need to undergo fundamental transformations. It is certainly true that the same social institution can successively perform very different functions without changing its nature!

VI

For a long time—and to some extent still today—the idea of soul was the popular form of the idea of personality.¹ The genesis of the first of these ideas should therefore help us to understand how the second came about.

From the preceding analysis it emerges that two sorts of factors produced the notion of person. One is essentially impersonal: the spiritual principle that serves as the soul of the collectivity. This is, in fact, what constitutes the very substance of individual souls. It does not belong to anyone in particular but is part of the collective patrimony; in and through it all consciousnesses commune. On the other hand, another factor must intervene that fragments this principle and differentiates it into separate personalities: in other words, there must be a factor of individuation. It is the body that plays this role. Since bodies are distinct from one another and occupy different points in time and space, each of them constitutes a special setting in

¹ It will be objected, perhaps, that unity is the characteristic of personality, while the soul has always been conceived as multiple, as susceptible to dividing and subdividing almost indefinitely. But we know today that unity of the person is equally made up of parts, that it too is susceptible to dividing and decomposing. Yet the notion of personality does not vanish just because we have ceased to conceive of it in the form of a metaphysical and indivisible atom. This is also true of those popular conceptions of personality that have found their expression in the idea of soul. They show that peoples have always had the feeling that the human personality did not have the absolute unity claimed by certain metaphysicians.

which collective representations are refracted and coloured in different ways. Consequently, while all consciousnesses engaged in these bodies view the same world, namely the world of ideas and feelings that form the moral unity of the group, they do not all see it from the same angle; each one expresses it in its own way.

Of these two equally indispensable factors, the impersonal element is certainly not the less important, for it provides the primary material for the idea of soul. It may be surprising to see such a substantial role attributed to the impersonal element in the genesis of the notion of personality. But the philosophical analysis of that idea, which considerably precedes the sociological analysis, arrived at similar results. Of all philosophers, Leibniz* is among those who had the strongest sense of the nature of personality, for the monad is above all a personal and autonomous being. And yet for Leibniz, the content of all monads is identical. All, in fact, are consciousnesses that express one and the same object, the world; and as the world itself is merely a system of representations, each particular consciousness is merely a reflection of the universal consciousness. Yet each one expresses it from its point of view and in its own way. We know that this difference of perspectives is the result of the monads being differently situated in relation to one another and in relation to the whole system they constitute.

Kant expresses the same feeling in another form. For him, the keystone of the personality is will. Now, will is the faculty of acting in conformity with reason, and reason is what is most impersonal in us. For reason is not my reason; it is human reason in general. It is the power of the mind to raise itself above the particular, the contingent, the individual, to think in the form of the universal. We can say, then, that from this point of view, what makes man a person is what he shares with other men, what makes him man and not a particular man. Conversely, Kant considers the senses, the body, in short everything that individualizes, antagonistic to the personality.

Individuation, then, is not the fundamental characteristic of the person. A person is not only a singular subject distinct from all others. Above and beyond that he is a being to which relative autonomy is attributed in relation to the setting with which he is most immediately in contact.* He is imagined as capable, to some extent, of moving on his own. This is what Leibniz expressed in an extreme fashion by saying that the monad is entirely self-enclosed. And our

analysis enables us to imagine how this conception was formed and to what it responds.

The soul, which is in fact the symbolic expression of the personality, has this same quality. Although closely tied to the body, it is considered profoundly distinct and largely independent of it. During life it can leave the body temporarily, and at death it withdraws for good. Far from being subordinate to the body, it dominates it from its higher position. It can certainly borrow from the body the external form in which it becomes individualized, but it owes it nothing essential. Indeed, the autonomy that all peoples have ascribed to the soul is not purely illusory, and now we know its objective basis. True, the elements that form the idea of soul and those that enter into the representation of the body issue from two different and entirely independent sources. Some are formed from impressions and images released from all points of the organism; others consist of ideas and feelings that come from society and express it. One does not derive from the other. So there really is a part of ourselves that is not immediately subordinate to the organic factor: namely everything inside us that represents society. The general ideas that religion or science imprint in our minds, the mental operations these ideas presuppose, the beliefs and feelings that are at the basis of our moral life—all the higher forms of psychic activity that society awakens and develops in us—do not follow in the wake of the body, like our sensations and our bodily states. This is because, as we have shown, the world of representations in which social life unfolds is overlaid on its material substrate and does not originate there. The determinism that reigns in that world is therefore much more supple than that which is rooted in our tissues and leaves the agent with a justified impression of greater freedom. The setting in which we move, then, is less opaque and less resistant: we feel, and we are, more at ease there. In a word, the only means we have of freeing ourselves from physical forces is to set collective forces against them.

But what we have from society we have in common with our fellow human beings. So it is hardly the case that the more individualized we are the more personal we are. The two terms are not in the least synonymous: in a sense, they oppose more than they imply one another. Passion individualizes and yet enslaves. Our sensations are essentially individual; but the more we free ourselves from the

senses, the more capable we are of thinking and acting through ideas, the more we are persons. Those who insist on all that is social in the individual do not mean to deny or denigrate personality. They simply will not confuse it with the fact of individuation.¹

¹ However, we do not deny the importance of the individual factor: in our view, it is explained quite as easily as its contrary. If the essential element of the personality is what is social in us, conversely there can be social life only if distinct individuals are associated, and it is all the richer when they are more numerous and different from one another. The individual factor is therefore a condition of the impersonal factor. The converse is no less true, for society itself is an important source of individual differentiation (see *Division du travail social*, 627 ff.).

CHAPTER 9

THE NOTION OF SPIRITS AND GODS

WITH the notion of soul we have left the circle of impersonal forces. But even the Australian religions recognize a higher order of mythic personalities above and beyond the soul: spirits, civilizing heroes, and even gods proper. Without going into the mythologies in detail, we must at least try to discover in what form these three categories of spiritual beings are present in Australia, and in what way they are connected to the religious system as a whole.

I

A soul is not a spirit. Indeed, it is enclosed in a specific body; while it may leave at certain times, it is usually that body's prisoner. It escapes it for good only at death, and even then we have seen how difficult this separation can be. The spirit, by contrast, although often closely bound to a particular object—a spring, a rock, a tree, a star, and so on—and residing there by preference, can readily take its leave and lead an independent existence in space. It also has a more extensive sphere of action. It can act on all individuals who approach it or whom it approaches. The soul, by contrast, has hardly any influence outside the body it animates; only very rarely in the course of its terrestrial life does it affect other subjects.

But while the soul lacks the distinctive features of the spirit, it acquires them, at least in part, through death. Indeed, once disembodied, as long as it has not again descended into a body, it has the same freedom of movement as a spirit. Certainly it is thought to leave for the land of souls once the mourning rites are over; but first it lingers around the tomb for some time. Moreover, even when it has separated for good, it is thought to hover around the camp, in the brush. It is generally imagined as a rather benevolent being, especially for surviving members of its family: we have seen that the soul of the father comes to nurture the growth of his children and grandchildren. But depending entirely on its mood and the way it is treated by the living, it may also show signs of real cruelty. So it is

advisable, especially for women and children, to avoid wandering outside the camp during the night, so as not to risk dangerous encounters.¹

A ghost, however, is not a true spirit. First, its power is generally limited; also, it has no definite functions. It is a vagabond with no clearly assigned tasks, for death has put it outside all conventional frameworks. In relation to the living, this is a kind of demotion. A spirit, by contrast, always has a certain sort of power which, as it were, defines it. It has authority over a certain order of cosmic and social phenomena, a rather precise function to perform in the world order.

But some souls satisfy this dual condition and are consequently spirits in the proper sense of the term. They are the souls of those mythic figures which popular imagination has placed at the origin of time—the Alcheringa or Aljirangamitjina of the Arunta, the Mura-mura of the Lake Eyre tribes, the Muk-Kutnais of the Kurnai, and so on. In a sense, they are still souls since they are thought to have formerly animated bodies from which they were separated at some point. But as we have seen, even when they were living a terrestrial life they already possessed exceptional powers; they had a *mana* superior to that of ordinary men and they preserved it. Moreover, they are entrusted with specific functions.

In the first place, whether we accept Spencer and Gillen's version or Strehlow's, it is these ancestral souls who ensure the periodic recruitment of the clan. They have authority over the phenomena of conception.

Once conception has taken place, the ancestor's task is not finished. It is up to him to watch over the newborn. Later, when the child has become a man, the ancestor accompanies him in the hunt, drives game towards him, warns him through dreams of possible dangers, protects him against his enemies, and so on. On this point Strehlow is entirely in agreement with Spencer and Gillen. True, some will wonder how, on their account, the ancestor can perform this function, for since he is reincarnated at the moment of conception, it seems he ought to be mingled with the soul of the child and consequently incapable of protecting him from the outside. But in reality the ancestor is not entirely reincarnated, but is instead only

¹ Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 517.

doubled. A part of him enters into the body of the woman and fertilizes her; another part continues to exist outside, and under the special name of *Arumburinga* he performs the duty of tutelary genius.

We see how closely this ancestral spirit is related to the Latins' *genius*, and the *δαίμων* of the Greeks. The functional identity is total. Indeed, the *genius* is primarily the one who engenders—*qui gignit*. It expresses and personifies the generative force. But at the same time it is the protector, the guide of the particular individual to whose person it is attached. Finally, it mingles with this individual's very personality; it represents the whole of the inclinations and tendencies that characterize him and make him distinctive among men. Hence the well-known expressions *indulgere genio*, *defraudare genium*, meaning 'follow one's own natural temperament'. Basically, the *genius* is another form—a double—of the very soul of the individual. Proof of this is that the relation between *genius* and *manes* is partly synonymous. *Manes* is the *genius* after death; but it is also what survives the deceased, namely his soul. In the same way, the soul of the Arunta and the ancestral spirit who serves as his *genius* are merely two different aspects of one and the same being.

But the ancestor is situated in a particular way not only in relation to persons but also to things. Although he is thought to have his real home under the earth, he is believed to haunt his nanja tree or rock, or the spring that flowed spontaneously at the precise place where he disappeared into the ground after ending his first existence. Since that tree or rock is supposed to represent the body of the hero, his soul itself is thought to return there constantly and reside there more or less permanently. The presence of this soul explains the religious respect these places inspire. No one can break a branch from the nanja tree without risk of falling ill. [. . .] Since this sacred character is attributed to the ancestor, the ancestor appears as the spirit of that tree, rock, water hole, or spring. Let the spring be thought to have some relation to rain and he will become a rain spirit. So those souls which, on the one hand, serve as protective geniuses to men also perform cosmic functions. [. . .]

As we have shown, the existence of individual souls, once granted, could not have been understood without imagining, at the beginning of things, an original store of fundamental souls from which all

others were derived. Now, these archetypal souls necessarily had to be conceived as containing the source of all religious efficacy; for since the imagination does not rise beyond this level, it is souls and souls alone that are thought to generate all sacred things: instruments of the cult, members of the clan, animals of the totemic species. They incarnate all religious feeling diffused throughout the tribe and throughout the world, and this is why people attribute to them powers clearly superior to those enjoyed by the mere souls of men. Besides, time alone increases and reinforces the sacredness of things. A very old *churinga* inspires much more respect than a recent one and is thought to have greater powers. The feelings of veneration directed toward it over successive generations have, so to speak, a cumulative effect. For the same reason, the figures who have been the object of myths transmitted by word of mouth over the centuries and of rites periodically enacted were bound to assume a unique place in the popular imagination.

But how does it happen that instead of remaining outside the frameworks of the society, these figures have become regular members of it?

This is because every individual is the double of an ancestor. Now, when two beings are so closely akin, they are naturally thought to be joined together; since they participate in the same nature, what affects one must, it seems, necessarily affect the other. The troop of mythic ancestors was thus attached by a moral bond to the society of the living; all were imagined sharing the same interests and passions; they were seen as associates. However, since the first had a higher status than the second, this association takes on, in the public mind, the form of a relation between superiors and inferiors, between patrons and clients, between benefactors and recipients. Hence was born that curious notion of the tutelary genius attached to every individual. [. . .]

These ideas put us in a position to understand a form of totemism that until now we had to leave unexplained: individual totemism.

An individual totem is defined essentially by the two following features: (1) it is a being in animal or plant form, whose function is to protect an individual; (2) the fate of this individual and that of his patron are closely tied: whatever affects the second is communicated sympathetically to the first. Now the ancestral spirits in question are similarly defined. They too come, at least in part, from the animal or

plant kingdom. They too are tutelary geniuses. Finally, a sympathetic bond unites each individual to his protective ancestor. The nanja tree, the mystical body of that ancestor, cannot really be destroyed without the man feeling threatened. Granted, today this belief is losing ground. Yet Spencer and Gillen have still observed it, and in any case they judge it to have been widespread in former times.

The identical nature of these ideas can be seen in the details. Ancestral souls reside in trees or rocks that are considered sacred. Similarly, among the Euahlayi, the spirit of the animal that serves as an individual totem is thought to inhabit a tree or a stone. This tree or stone is sacred, no one but the one whose totem it is can touch it; and when it is a stone or rock, this prohibition is absolute. As a result, these are true places of refuge.

Finally, we have seen that the individual soul is merely another aspect of the ancestral spirit; according to Strehlow, this spirit in some way serves as a second self.¹ Similarly, according to Mrs Parker's testimony, the individual totem of the Euahlayi, called Yunbeai, is the individual's alter ego: "The soul of the man is in his Yunbeai, and the soul of his Yunbeai is in him."² In effect, then, we have the same soul in two bodies. [. . .] The individual totem is merely the external and visible form of the self, and the soul is its internal and invisible form.

Thus the individual totem has all the essential features of the protective ancestor and plays the same role because it has the same origin and arises from the same idea.

Both actually consist of a doubling of the soul. The totem, like the ancestor, is the soul of the individual, but externalized and invested with powers superior to those it is thought to possess inside the body. Now, this doubling is the product of a psychological necessity, for it simply expresses the nature of the soul, which, as we have seen, is double. In one sense, it is ours, it expresses our personality. But at the same time it is outside of us since it is merely the extension within us of a religious power that is external to us. We cannot mingle with it entirely, since we ascribe to it an excellence and a dignity that elevates it above us and our empirical individuality. So

¹ Strehlow, *Aranda*, ii. 81.

² K. Langloh Parker and Catherine Sommerville Field Parker, *The Euahlayi Tribe* (London: A. Constable, 1905), 21.

there is a whole part of ourselves that we tend to project outside us. This way of conceiving ourselves is so solidly based in our nature that we cannot escape it, even when we try to think of ourselves without recourse to any religious symbol. Our moral conscience is the core around which the notion of the soul is formed; and yet, when it speaks to us, it seems to be a higher external power handing down the law and judging us, but also helping and sustaining us. When we have it on our side, we feel stronger facing the trials of life, more certain of overcoming them, just as the Australian, confident in his ancestor or his personal totem, feels more valiant against his enemies. Thus there is something objective at the basis of these different ideas—whether the Roman *genius*, the individual totem, or the ancestor of the Alcheringa. This is why they have survived in disparate forms until our own day. It is as if we really had two souls: one that is inside us, or rather is us; the other that is above us, whose function is to control and assist us. Frazer sensed that in the individual totem there was an external soul, but he believed that this externality was the product of artifice and magic tricks. In reality it is implicit in the very idea of soul.

II

The spirits in question are essentially benevolent. Of course they can be angry if a man does not behave properly toward them; but it is not their function to do harm.

Yet, in itself the spirit can do harm as well as good. That is why a class of clever geniuses was naturally invented, in contrast to the auxiliary and tutelary spirits, that allowed men to explain the enduring evils they suffered—nightmares, illnesses, storms and hurricanes, and so on. Of course, it is not that all these human miseries seemed too abnormal to be explained by any but supernatural forces, but that all forces were conceived in religious form. After all, a religious principle was considered the source of life; it was therefore logical to relate all events that disturb or destroy life to a principle of the same kind.

These harmful spirits seem to have been conceived on the same model as the benevolent geniuses mentioned above. They are imagined in animal form, or as half-animal, half-human; but people are naturally inclined to endow them with vast dimensions and a

dreadful aspect. Like the souls of ancestors, they are thought to inhabit trees, rocks, water holes, underground caverns. [. . .] Some of them were continually cruel and mean; others had a naturally poor constitution, making them thin and bony; and when they sank into the ground, the nanja rocks to which they gave birth were considered to harbour dangerous influences.

Only specific characteristics distinguish them from their peers, the heroes of the Alcheringa. They do not reincarnate themselves; among living men, there is not one who represents them; they have no human posterity. When certain signs indicate that a child is the product of their efforts, it is put to death as soon as it is born.¹ Moreover, they do not issue from any specific totemic centre, and they exist outside all social frameworks. All these features indicate that their powers are much more magical than religious. And indeed they are especially connected with the magician, who often takes his powers from them. We have thus come to the place where the world of religion ends and the world of magic begins; and since this is outside the scope of our enquiry, we need pursue it no further.

III

The appearance of the notion of spirit marks an important advance in the individuation of religious forces.

However, the spiritual beings in question until now are still only secondary figures. Either they are malevolent geniuses who arise more from magic than religion; or, attached to a particular individual and place, they can make their influence felt only within a very limited radius. Therefore they can be the objects only of private and local rites. But once the idea of spirit emerged, it was naturally extended to more elevated spheres of religious life, and mythic personalities of a higher order were born.

Although the ceremonies proper to each clan differ from one another, they belong to the same religion none the less; and a certain number of basic similarities exist between them. Since all the clans are merely parts of one and the same tribe, the unity of the tribe is palpable through the diversity of particular cults. And indeed, there

¹ Strehlow, *Aranda*, i. 14. When there are twins, the firstborn is thought to be conceived in this way.

is no totemic group that does not have *churingas*, or bull-roarers, which are always used in the same way. The organization of the tribe into phratries, matrimonial classes, and clans, and the exogamous prohibitions attached to them, are genuine tribal institutions. Initiation ceremonies all include certain basic practices—tooth extraction, circumcision, subincision, and so on—that do not vary within the same tribe despite different clan totems. Uniformity on this point is all the more easily established since the initiation always takes place in the presence of the tribe, or at least before an assembly to which the different clans have been summoned. For the purpose of initiation is to introduce the neophyte into the religious life, not only of the clan into which he is born, but of the entire tribe. Therefore the varied aspects of tribal religion must be represented to him and acted out, in some fashion, before his eyes. It is on this occasion that the moral and religious unity of the tribe is best affirmed.

In every society, then, there are a certain number of rites distinguished by their homogeneity and their generality. Such a remarkable concordance could only be explained, it seems, by a common origin. Therefore it was imagined that every group of similar rites had been instituted by one and the same ancestor who had come to reveal them to the whole tribe. [. . .]

These special ancestors could not share the same status with the others. On the one hand, the feelings of veneration they inspired were not limited to a clan but common to the whole tribe. Moreover, the most valued aspects of tribal civilization were ascribed to them. For this double reason they became the object of special consideration. It is said of Atnatu, for example, that he was born in the sky, in a period previous even to the time of the Alcheringa, and that he created and *named himself*. The stars are his wives or daughters. Beyond the sky where he lives, there is another with another sun. Its name is sacred and must never be pronounced before women or the uninitiated.¹ [. . .]

IV

And yet this mythological formation is not the most advanced to be found among the Australians. There are at least a number of tribes

¹ See, for example, *Northern Tribes*, 499.

that have arrived at the idea of one supreme, if not unique, god thought to have pre-eminent status in relation to other religious beings. [. . .]

The essential features of this figure are always the same. He is an immortal, even eternal being deriving from no other. After living on earth for a time, he rose to the sky or was carried there, where he continues to live surrounded by his family; for he is generally endowed with one or several wives, children, and brothers who sometimes assist him in his duties. Because he lives there, he and his relations are often identified with particular stars. He is also endowed with power over the stars. He governs the course of the sun and the moon, and gives them their orders. He causes lightning to leap forth from the clouds and hurls thunderbolts. Because he is thunder, he is also associated with rain, and he is the one appealed to when there is drought or flood.

He is spoken of as a sort of creator; he is called the father of men and is said to have made them. According to a legend that had currency in Melbourne, the tribal deity Bunjil made the first man in the following way. He made a statuette of clay; then he danced around it several times, breathed into the nostrils, and the statuette came alive and began to move. According to another myth, Bunjil lit up the sun; the earth was then warmed and men emerged from it. When he made man, this divine figure also made animals and trees, and all the arts of life—weapons, language, and tribal rites. He is the benefactor of humanity. Even now he plays the role of a kind of Providence. He provides his faithful with everything necessary to their existence. He is in touch with them either directly or through intermediaries. But at the same time, as guardian of tribal morality, he punishes men when that morality is violated. Furthermore, if we can rely on certain observers, he performs the office of judge after death; he makes distinctions between the good and the bad, and treats them accordingly. In any case, he is often presented as gate-keeper to the land of the dead, welcoming souls when they arrive in the hereafter.

Since initiation is the chief form of the tribal cult, the rites of initiation are especially associated with him, and he is central to them. Very often he is represented in these rites by an image carved into treebark or moulded out of earth. People dance around it, singing in its honour, even reciting actual prayers to it. The young men

are taught who the figure is behind this image, and they are told his secret name, something that women and the uninitiated must not know; they are told of his history, the role that tradition attributes to him in the life of the tribe. At other moments they lift their hands toward the sky where he is thought to reside, or point in the same direction with weapons or ritual instruments in hand. This is a way of putting themselves into communication with him. His presence is felt everywhere. He watches over the neophyte while he is secluded in the forest. He is vigilant about the way the ceremonies are conducted. Initiation is his cult, and he takes care that these rites, in particular, are correctly observed. When there are mistakes or negligence, he wreaks a terrible vengeance.

The authority of each of these supreme gods is, moreover, not restricted to a single tribe but is equally recognized by a plurality of neighbouring tribes. Bunjil is adored nearly throughout the state of Victoria, Baiame in a large part of New South Wales, and so on; this explains why these gods are so few in number for a relatively extended geographical area. Their cults, then, have an international character. It even happens that these mythological differences mingle, combine, and borrow from one another. [. . .] It is hardly the case, then, that religious internationalism is a particular feature of the most recent and most advanced religions. From the beginning of history, religious beliefs display a tendency to resist enclosure in a politically delimited society; they have a natural aptitude for crossing frontiers, becoming diffused and internationalized. [. . .]

To Tylor, this idea seemed to be such an advanced theology that he refused to see it as anything but a European import—a denatured Christian idea.¹ A. Lang, in contrast,² considered it indigenous; but granting that it contrasts with the universality of Australian beliefs and rests on quite different principles, he concludes that the religions of Australia are made up of two heterogeneous systems superimposed on one another, and consequently deriving from a dual origin. On the one hand, there were ideas relating to totems and spirits that would have been suggested to man by the spectacle of certain natural phenomena. But at the same time, by a sort of

¹ Edward Burnett Tylor, 'On the Limits of Savage Religion', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 21 (1892), 292 ff.

² Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* (London: Longmans, 1898), 187–293.

intuition (the nature of which he refuses to explain¹), human intelligence would have suddenly managed to conceive of a single god, creator of the world, legislator of the moral order. Lang even judges that at first, especially in Australia, this idea was gradually covered over and obscured by the ever-growing mass of animist and totemistic superstitions. It would thus have suffered a sort of progressive degeneration until the day when, under the influence of a privileged culture, it managed to recover and reaffirm itself once again, with a brilliance and clarity it did not originally possess.

But the facts do not support either Tylor's sceptical hypothesis or Lang's theological interpretation.

In the first place, we know today that ideas relating to the great tribal god are indigenous. They were observed when the influence of missionaries had not yet been felt. But it does not follow that they must be ascribed to a mysterious revelation. It is hardly the case that they derive from a different source from totemic beliefs proper; on the contrary, they are merely the logical issue and highest form of those beliefs.

We have seen that the notion of mythic ancestors is implied by the very principles that form the basis of totemism; for each of them is a totemic being. Now, while the great gods are surely superior to them, they are merely different in degree, and we move from the first to the second without any breach of continuity. A great god is, in fact, an ancestor of particular importance. He is often spoken of as a man—endowed with superhuman powers, true, but one who lived a fully human life on earth. He is depicted as a great hunter, a powerful magician, the founder of the tribe. He is first among men. One legend even represents him in the guise of a tired old man who can hardly move. [. . .]

The Australians were encouraged to make the shift in their thinking from a plurality of ancestral geniuses to the idea of the tribal god by a middle term interposed between the two extremes that served as a transitional mode: the civilizing heroes. The fabulous beings called by this name are, in fact, simply ancestors to whom mythology has ascribed an eminent role in the history of the tribe and has for this reason placed above the others. We have even seen that they were a

¹ Ibid. 331. Mr Lang says only that the hypothesis of St Paul* seems the least defective ("not the most unsatisfactory").

regular part of the totemic organization: the tribal deity Mangarkunjerkunja is of the lizard totem, and Putiaputia of the wildcat totem. On the other hand, the functions they are thought to perform, or have performed, come very close to those assigned to the high god. He too is thought to have initiated men in the arts of civilization, founded major social institutions, and revealed the great religious ceremonies that remain under his control. If he is the father of men, that is because he made them rather than engendering them; but Mangarkunjerkunja did as much. Before him there were no men, but only masses of amorphous flesh in which different body parts and individuals were not yet separated. He is the one who sculpted this primal matter into proper human beings. There is merely a nuance of difference between this method of fabrication and the one that myth ascribes to Bunjil. In addition, the tie that binds these two kinds of figures to one another is made evident by a filial relation that is sometimes established between them. [. . .]

Certainly, we must not conclude from these facts that the high god is nothing more than a civilizing hero. There are cases in which these two characters are clearly differentiated. But while they are not identical, they are at least related. It is also very difficult to distinguish them from one another; there are some which can be classified equally in either category. Thus we have mentioned Atnatu as a civilizing hero, but he is very close to being a high god. The notion of a supreme god is so closely dependent upon the whole system of totemic beliefs that it still bears their mark. [. . .]

We can go even further and be more specific about the high gods' relationship to the totemic system. Daramulun, like Bunjil, is an eaglehawk, and we know that this animal is a phratry totem in a great many tribes of the south-east. Nuralie seems to have been at first a collective term that vaguely designated either eaglehawks or crows; now, in the tribes in which this myth was found, the crow serves as totem to one of the two phratries, the eaglehawk to the other. Further, the legendary history of the high gods closely resembles the history of the phratry totems. The myths, and sometimes the rites, commemorate the battles each of these divinities fought against a carnivorous bird and won only with great difficulty. Bunjil, or the first man, after making the second man, Karween, fought with him and, in the course of a kind of duel, wounded him gravely and transformed him into a crow. The two kinds of Nuralie are presented

as two enemy groups that were originally at war. Baiaame, for his part, has to fight against Mullian, the eaglehawk cannibal, who is moreover identified with Daramulun. Now, we have seen that there is also a kind of inborn hostility between the phratry totems. This parallel proves that the mythology of the high gods and that of these totems are closely related. This kinship will seem even clearer if we note that the rival of the god is regularly either the crow or the eaglehawk, which are generally phratry totems.

Baiaame, Daramulun, Nuralie, and Bunjil seem, then, very like phratry totems that have become divinities; and this is how we can imagine such an apotheosis took place. It is clearly in the assemblies that this conception was elaborated during rites of initiation; for the high gods play a significant role only in these rites, while they are foreign to other religious ceremonies. Moreover, since initiation is the chief form of the tribal cult, it is only on this occasion that a tribal mythology could be born. We have already seen how the rituals of circumcision and subincision tended to become personified in the form of civilizing heroes. However, these heroes exercised no supremacy, they were on the same footing as society's other legendary benefactors. But when the tribe felt itself more vividly, this feeling was quite naturally embodied in a figure that became its divine symbol. To explain to themselves the bonds that unite them to one another, to whatever clan they belong to, men imagined that they had sprung from the same stock, that they were the children of the same father to whom they owed their existence, though he owed his to no one. The god of initiation was just right for this role; for according to an expression that comes often to the lips of the natives, the object of initiation is precisely to make, to fashion, men. To this god, then, they attribute a creative power, and for all these reasons he is invested with a prestige that puts him well above the other heroes of mythology. These become his subordinates, his auxiliaries; they are declared his sons or his younger brothers, like Tundun, Gayandi, Darween, Pallyan, and so on. But there were already other sacred beings who held an equally eminent place in the religious system of the tribe: these are the phratry totems. Wherever these have endured, they are thought to have dominance over the clan totems. So they were poised to become tribal divinities themselves. It was therefore natural that these two sorts of mythic figures partially merged; hence one of the two basic totems of the tribe lent his

features to the high god. But since it was necessary to explain why only one of them was called to this honour and not the other, it was assumed that the latter had lost a fight against his rival and been excluded after his defeat. The idea was all the more easily accepted as it accorded with the mythology as a whole, since the phratry totems are generally considered each other's enemies.

A myth that Mrs Parker observed among the Euahlayi¹ confirms this explanation, for it merely translates it into figurative form. In this tribe, it is said, the totems were at first only names given to different parts of Baiame's body. The clans would then be, in a sense, fragments of the divine body. Is this not another way of saying that the high god is a synthesis of all the totems, and consequently the personification of tribal unity?

At the same time, it takes on an international character. Indeed, members of the tribe to which the young initiates belong are not the only ones who witness the ceremonies of initiation; representatives of neighbouring tribes are specially summoned to these festivals, which are rather like international fairs, at once religious and secular. Beliefs elaborated in these social settings cannot remain the exclusive patrimony of one nationality. The foreigner to whom they are revealed shares them with his native tribe once he has returned home; and since sooner or later he is obliged in turn to invite his hosts, there is a continual exchange of ideas from one society to another. In this way an international mythology was constituted in which the high god was quite naturally the essential element since he had his origin in the rites of initiation that he personified. His name thus passed from one language to the other with the representations attached to it. The fact that the names of the phratries are generally common to very different tribes could only facilitate this diffusion. The internationalism of phratry totems paved the way for the internationalism of the high god.

V

So we arrive at the most advanced idea that totemism achieved. This is the point at which it converges with and paves the way for the

¹ Parker and Parker, *The Euahlayi Tribe*, 7. Among the same people, Baiame's principal wife is equally represented as the mother of all totems, without being a totem herself (ibid. 7 and 78).

religions that will follow, and helps us to understand them. But at the same time, we can see that this culminating notion is seamlessly connected to the cruder beliefs we analysed at the outset.

The tribal high god is, in fact, simply an ancestral spirit who managed in the end to win a prominent place. The ancestral spirits are simply beings forged in the image of individual souls whose genesis they are meant to account for. The souls, in turn, are simply the form taken by the impersonal forces we have found at the basis of totemism when they become individualized in particular bodies. The unity of the system equals its complexity.

In this work of elaboration, the idea of soul has no doubt played an important role: through it the idea of personality was introduced into the religious domain. But it is far from true that—as the theorists of animism claim—it contains the seeds of the whole religion. First of all, it presupposes the notion of *mana* or the totemic principle, of which it is merely a particular mode. Then, although the spirits and gods could not be conceived before the idea of soul, they are none the less something different from a simple human soul freed by death. For what is the source of their superhuman powers? The idea of soul has only served to orient the mythological imagination in a new direction, to suggest constructions of a new kind. But the material of these constructions was borrowed, not from the representation of the soul, but from that reservoir of anonymous and diffuse forces that constitute the primitive foundation of religions. The creation of mythic personalities was merely another way of conceiving those essential forces.

As for the notion of a high god, it is entirely owing to a feeling we have already observed operating in the genesis of the most specifically totemic beliefs: the tribal feeling. We have seen, indeed, that totemism was not the isolated work of the clans, but that it was always elaborated in the bosom of a tribe that was to some degree conscious of its unity. It is for this reason that the different individual cults of each clan converge and complete each other to form a unified whole. So indeed the same causes are operating from the bottom to the top of this religious system.

However, until now we have regarded religious representations as though they were self-sufficient and could be self-explanatory. In fact, they are inseparable from rites, not only because they are manifest in them but because, conversely, they are influenced by them.

Undoubtedly the cult rests on beliefs, but it also acts on them. To understand them better, it is therefore important to have a better understanding of the cult. The moment has come to undertake that study.

BOOK III

PRINCIPAL RITUAL CONDUCT

CHAPTER I

THE NEGATIVE CULT AND ITS FUNCTIONS

ASCETIC RITES

IN what follows, we do not intend to offer a complete description of the primitive cult. Since our main concern is to discover what is most elementary and basic in religious life, we will not try to reconstitute in detail the often confusing multiplicity of all ritual acts. But out of the great variety of practices, we would like to cull the primitive's most characteristic conduct as he celebrates his cult, to classify the most general forms of his rites and determine their origins and meaning, and finally to verify and specify the conclusions to which this analysis of beliefs has led us.¹

Every cult presents two aspects: one negative, the other positive. In reality these two kinds of rites are closely associated; as we shall see, they presuppose one another. But they are different none the less, and we must distinguish between them, if only to understand their connections.

I

Sacred beings are, by definition, separate beings. They are characterized by a discontinuity between them and profane beings. Normally, the sacred and the profane are outside each other. A whole set of rites exists to bring about this crucial state of separation. Since their function is to prevent unwarranted mixing and contact, to prevent one of the two domains from encroaching on the other, these rites can only decree abstentions, or negative acts. For this reason we propose to call the system formed by these special rites a 'negative cult'. They do not instruct the faithful to engage in acts of homage but are restricted to prohibiting certain ways of acting; thus such rites take the form of the prohibition, or, as we say in ethnography, the *taboo*. This word is used in Polynesian languages to designate the

¹ We will leave aside altogether one form of ritual, oral ritual, which will be examined in a special volume of the collection of *L'Année sociologique*.

institution by virtue of which certain things are withdrawn from ordinary use;¹ it is also an adjective that expresses the distinctive character of such things. We have already had occasion to show how problematic it is to transform a narrowly local and dialectical expression into a generic term. There is no religion in which prohibitions do not exist and in which they do not play a considerable role; so it is regrettable that the official terminology seems to make a peculiarity specific to Polynesia into such a universal institution.² The terms *prohibitions* or *interdictions* seem much preferable. However, the word 'taboo', like the word 'totem', has such currency that it would be excessively purist to prohibit it altogether. Besides, its drawbacks are reduced if we are careful to specify its scope and meaning.

But there are different kinds of prohibitions, and it is important to distinguish between them. We shall not treat every sort of prohibition in this chapter.

First of all, apart from those revealed by religion, there are some that arise from magic. Both sorts rule that certain things are incompatible and prescribe the separation of things thus declared. But there are also serious differences between them. First, the sanctions are not the same in both cases. Of course, as will be mentioned below, the violation of religious prohibitions is often automatically regarded as the cause of physical disorders from which the guilty person is thought to suffer, and which are considered a punishment for his act. But even if it does happen, this spontaneous and automatic sanction never stands alone; it is always accompanied by another that assumes human intervention. Either a punishment proper is added to it—if it does not precede it—and this punishment is deliberately inflicted by men; or at the very least there is blame and public disapproval. Even when a sacrilege has been punished by its author's illness or natural death, he is also stigmatized. It offends public opinion, which reacts against it, putting the person who committed it in a state of sin. By contrast, a magical prohibition is

¹ See the article 'Taboo' by Frazer in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1887).

² The facts prove this to be a real drawback. Many writers have thought, on the strength of the word, that the institution designated this way was limited either to primitive societies in general or even to the Polynesian peoples themselves (see Albert Reville, *Religion et des peuples primitifs* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1883), ii. 55; Gaston Richard, *La Femme dans l'histoire: étude sur l'évolution de la condition sociale de la femme* (Paris: O. Doin et Fils, 1909), 435).

sanctioned only by material consequences, which the forbidden act is thought to produce with a kind of physical necessity. Disobedience incurs risks, like those run by a patient who does not follow his doctor's advice; but in this case, disobedience does not constitute a sin; it is not worthy of that. There is no sin in magic.

This difference in sanctions, moreover, implies an underlying difference in the nature of the prohibitions. The religious prohibition necessarily implies the notion of the sacred; it comes from the respect that the sacred object inspires, and its aim is to prevent any lack of that respect. By contrast, magical prohibitions presuppose only the utterly secular notion of property. The things the magician recommends keeping separate are those that, because of their characteristic properties, cannot be mixed or brought into contact safely. Although he may ask his clients to keep their distance from certain sacred things, it is not out of respect for them and fear that they might be profaned—for magic, as we know, thrives on profanations—but only for reasons of secular utility. In short, religious prohibitions are categorical imperatives, whereas magical prohibitions are utilitarian maxims, the earliest form of hygienic and medical prohibitions.* Since two such different orders of facts cannot be studied simultaneously and under the same rubric without utter confusion, we must concern ourselves here only with religious prohibitions.¹

But we must make a further distinction among religious prohibitions. There are religious prohibitions whose aim is to separate different kinds of sacred things. Recall, for example, how, among the *Wakelbura*, the platform on which the dead person is laid out must be built exclusively of materials that come from the phratry of the deceased. All contact is forbidden between the dead person, who is sacred, and things belonging to the other phratry, which are sacred too, but on different grounds. Elsewhere, weapons used for hunting an animal must not be made from a wood that is classified in the same social group as the animal itself. But the most important of these interdictions will be studied in a later chapter: those meant to

¹ This is not to say that there is a radical discontinuity between religious and magical prohibitions; on the contrary, there are some whose true nature is ambiguous. It is often hard to say whether certain prohibitions in folklore are religious or magical. Making the distinction is none the less necessary; for magical prohibitions can be understood, we believe, only in terms of religious prohibitions.

prevent all communication between the pure sacred and the impure sacred, between the auspicious sacred and the inauspicious sacred. All these prohibitions have one common characteristic: they come about not because some things are sacred things and others are not, but because there are relations of disparity and incompatibility between sacred things. So they do not depend on what is essential to the idea of the sacred. And observance of these prohibitions can lead only to isolated, particular, and quite unusual rites. But it would not constitute a cult properly speaking, for a cult is the result, first and foremost, of regular relations between the profane and the sacred as such.

There is another, much more extensive and important system of religious interdictions that separates, not different sorts of sacred things, but all that is sacred from all that is profane. It comes directly from the very notion of the sacred, which it expresses and enacts. It also provides the material for a real cult, and indeed a cult that forms the basis of all others, for in their dealings with sacred beings, the faithful must never depart from the conduct it prescribes. This is what we call the negative cult. It can be said, then, that these prohibitions are religious prohibitions par excellence.¹ And they will be the exclusive subject of the pages that follow.

They take many forms. Here are the principal types observed in Australia.

First and foremost are prohibitions of contact. These are the primary taboos, and the others are hardly more than particular varieties of them. They rest on the principle that the profane must not touch the sacred. We have already seen that the *churingas* or bull-roarers must under no circumstances be handled by the uninitiated. If adults are free to use them, this is because initiation has conferred on them

¹ Our view is that many prohibitions among sacred things amount to the prohibition between sacred and profane. This is the case with prohibitions of age or rank. In Australia, for example, there are sacred foods reserved exclusively for the initiated. But these foods are not all sacred to the same degree; there is a hierarchy among them. On their side, the initiates are not all equal. They do not all enjoy their religious rights to the full, but enter into the domain of sacred things only step by step. They must pass through a whole series of ranks conferred upon them, one after the other, after special trials and ceremonies. It takes months, sometimes even years, to achieve the highest rank. Now, at each rank, special foods are assigned; men of the lower ranks cannot touch food that belongs by right to men of the upper ranks. [. . .] The more sacred therefore repels the less sacred; but this is because the second is profane in relation to the first. In short, all religious interdictions fall into two categories: interdictions between the sacred and the profane, and those between the pure sacred and the impure sacred.

a sacred character. Blood, especially blood that is spilled during the initiation, has a religious force; it falls under the same prohibition. The same is true for hair. The dead person is a sacred being because the soul that animated the body adheres to the corpse; for this reason, it is sometimes forbidden to carry the bones of the dead unless they are wrapped in a piece of bark. The very place where death occurred must be avoided, for it is believed that the soul of the deceased continues to linger there. This is why they break camp and move some distance away. In certain cases, they destroy the camp and all it contains, and a certain amount of time must pass before they can return to the same place. Sometimes the dying person already creates a kind of void around him, and is abandoned after being settled as comfortably as possible.

One exceptionally intimate contact results from the consumption of a particular food. Hence the interdiction against eating sacred animals or plants, notably those that serve as totems. Such an act seems to be so sacrilegious that it is prohibited even to adults, or at any rate to most of them. Only elderly men have achieved sufficient religious rank sometimes to escape this prohibition. [. . .]

Moreover, while certain sacred foods are forbidden to profane persons, other profane foods are forbidden to sacred persons. Thus it often happens that specific animals are especially designated for women's consumption; for this reason they are thought to participate in female nature and are, as a consequence, profane. In contrast, the young initiate is subject to a particularly harsh set of rites. An exceptionally powerful beam of religious forces is trained on him so as to transmit to him the powers he needs to enter the world of sacred things from which he was previously excluded. He is therefore in a state of holiness that strongly repels all that is profane. And he is prohibited from eating the game that is considered appropriate for women.¹

¹ A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 674. There is a prohibition of contact which is not part of our discussion because its precise nature is not very easily determined: that is sexual contact. There are religious periods when men must not have intercourse with women (B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 293, 295; Howitt, *Native Tribes*, 387). Is this because women are profane or because the sexual act is so dreaded? The question cannot be resolved in passing. We postpone it, along with everything that concerns conjugal and sexual rites. They are too closely bound to the problem of marriage and family to be separated from it.

However, contact can be made in ways other than touch. One establishes relations with a thing simply by gazing on it: the gaze is a way of making contact. This is why the sight of certain sacred things is, in some cases, forbidden to the profane. A woman must never see the instruments of the cult, or at most she is allowed to glimpse them from afar.¹ This is also true for totemic paintings made on the body of celebrants for particularly important ceremonies.² The exceptional solemnity of the initiation rites dictates that, in certain tribes, women cannot even see the places where those rites are celebrated³ or the neophyte himself. The sacredness inherent in the whole ceremony naturally resonates in those who direct it or participate in it in some way; so the novice cannot lift his eyes to look at them, and the prohibition lasts even after the rite is completed. [. . .]

Speech is another way of entering into relations with persons or things. The exhaled breath establishes a connection since it is a part of us that is released to the outside. So profane beings are forbidden to address speech to sacred beings or even to speak in their presence. Just as the neophyte must look at neither celebrants nor spectators, he is prohibited from conversing with them other than by signs. [. . .]

In addition to sacred things, there are words and sounds that have the same quality and must not be found on the lips of the profane or within their hearing. There are ritual songs that women must not hear on pain of death.⁴ They can hear the noise of the bull-roarers, but only from a distance. Any proper name is considered an essential element of the person who bears it. The name is so closely associated in people's minds with the idea of that person that it participates in the feelings the person inspires. So, if that person is sacred, the name itself is sacred, and cannot be pronounced in the course of ordinary life. Among the Warramunga, there is a totem that is particularly venerated; this is the mythic serpent called Wollunqua, and its name is taboo. Likewise with Baiame, Daramulun, and Bunjil: the esoteric forms of their names cannot be revealed to the uninitiated. During mourning, the name of the dead person must not be mentioned, at least by his kin, unless it is absolutely necessary, and then only in

¹ B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 134; Howitt, *Native Tribes*, 354.

² Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 624.

³ Howitt, *Native Tribes*, 572.

⁴ *Ibid.* 581.

whispers. [. . .] There is more: friends and relations are sometimes forbidden to use certain words of the usual language, no doubt because they were used by the dead person; these gaps are filled by means of paraphrase or loan words from a foreign dialect. In addition to their common public name, men bear a second secret name. Women and children do not know it, and it is never used in ordinary life due to its religious character.¹ There are even ceremonies which are conducted in a special language, normally forbidden in profane matters. This is a beginning of sacred language.

Not only are sacred beings separated from profane ones, but nothing that directly or indirectly concerns profane life must be mingled with religious life. Complete nudity is often required of the native as a prerequisite for being allowed to participate in the rite; he is required to shed all his usual ornaments, even those most precious to him and from which he is reluctant to part because of the protective powers he attributes to them. If he is obliged to decorate himself to play his ritual role, this decoration must be done specially for the occasion; it is a ceremonial costume, a vestment. Because these ornaments are sacred by virtue of their usage, it is forbidden to use them in profane activities. Once the ceremony is over, they are buried or burned. Men must even wash themselves so as to leave no trace of the decorations that adorned them.

More generally, the typical acts of ordinary life are forbidden while those that are part of religious life are going on. The act of eating is, in itself, profane; for it takes place every day, it satisfies essentially utilitarian and physical needs, and is part of our daily existence.² [. . .]

For the same reason, all secular occupations are suspended when the great religious festivals take place. According to an observation of Spencer and Gillen,³ which we have already had occasion to cite, the life of the Australian falls into two quite distinct parts: one is taken up with hunting, fishing, and war; the other is devoted to the

¹ Ibid. 657; Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 139; *Northern Tribes*, 580 ff.

² Granted, this act takes on a religious character when the food consumed is sacred. But the act itself is so profane that the consumption of a sacred food always constitutes a profanation. The profanation can be allowed or even ordered, but, as we shall see below, on the condition that rites precede or accompany it that mitigate or expiate the violation. The very existence of these rites indicates that the sacred thing resists being consumed.

³ Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, 33.

cult. And these two forms of activities are mutually exclusive and resistant. The universal institution of religious days of rest is based on this principle. The distinctive character of holidays in all known religions is the cessation of work and the suspension of public and private life, insofar as it has no religious objective. This time of rest is not simply a kind of temporary respite men may have granted themselves so as to indulge more freely in the feelings of elation that holidays generally arouse, since it is no less mandatory during those sad holidays devoted to mourning and penance. But work is the pre-eminent form of profane activity: its only apparent aim is to meet the secular necessities of life; it connects us exclusively with ordinary things. On holidays, on the other hand, religious life reaches an exceptional degree of intensity because the contrast between these two aspects of life is particularly marked at this time, hence they cannot coexist. Man cannot draw near to his god while he still bears the marks of his profane life; conversely, he cannot return to his usual occupations when the rite has just sanctified him. Ritual cessation of work, then, is merely a particular case of the general incompatibility that separates the sacred from the profane; it is the result of a prohibition.

There is no way to list every sort of prohibition observed, even if we limit ourselves to Australian religions. Like the notion of the sacred on which it rests, the system of prohibitions extends to the most disparate relations, and is even deliberately used for utilitarian ends.¹ As complex as this system may be, however, it finally comes down to two basic prohibitions that embody and govern it.

First, religious life and profane life cannot coexist in the same

¹ Because inside every man there is a sacred principle, the soul, the individual is surrounded by prohibitions from the beginning; these were the original form of the moral prohibitions that isolate and protect the human person today. Hence the body of his victim is considered dangerous to the murderer (Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 492) and is forbidden to him. The prohibitions that have this origin are often used by individuals as a means of withdrawing certain things from common usage and establishing proprietary rights over them. 'Does a man depart from camp, leaving weapons, food, etc. there?' asks Walter Edmund Roth with regard to the Palmer River tribes (North Queensland). 'If he urinates near objects that he has left behind, they become *tami* (equivalent of the word "taboo"), and he can be assured of finding them intact upon his return' ('North Queensland Ethnography', *Records of the Australian Museum*, 7/2: 75). This is because urine, like blood, is thought to contain a part of the sacred force that is unique to the individual. It keeps strangers at a distance. For the same reasons, speech can also serve as a vehicle of these same influences. This is why it is possible to prohibit

space. For religious life to flourish, a special place must be arranged from which profane life is excluded. Hence the institution of temples and sanctuaries: these spaces are assigned to sacred things and beings, and serve as their residence, for they can claim this ground for themselves only by appropriating it entirely within a specific radius. Arrangements of this kind are so indispensable to all religious life that even the simplest religions cannot dispense with them. The *ertnatulunga*, that place where the *churingas* are placed, is a true sanctuary. And the uninitiated are forbidden to come near. Engaging in any sort of profane occupation is also forbidden there. [. . .]

Similarly, religious life and profane life cannot coexist in the same time frames. Therefore, specific days or periods must be assigned to religious life in which all profane occupations are suspended. This is how holidays came about. There is no religion, and consequently no society, that has not known and practised this division of time into two separate parts that alternate with one another according to a law that varies with people and civilizations. It is even very likely, as we have said, that the necessity for this alternation led man to impose external distinctions and differentiations upon the continuity and homogeneity of duration. Of course it is nearly impossible for religious life ever to be concentrated hermetically in the spatial and temporal settings thus attributed to it; something inevitably filters through from the outside. There are always sacred things outside the sanctuaries, and there are rites that can be celebrated on work-days. But these are sacred things of the second rank and of lesser importance. Concentration remains the chief characteristic of this organization. And it is generally total with regard to everything involving the public cult, which can be celebrated only collectively. The private, individual cult is the only one that mingles rather intimately with secular life. Therefore, the contrast between these two successive phases of human life is greatest in lower societies such as the Australian tribes, for here the cult of the individual is least developed.

access to a particular object by simple verbal declaration. Moreover, this power to create prohibitions varies according to individuals—the more sacred they are, the greater this power. Men have the privilege of this power to the virtual exclusion of women (Roth cites a single example of taboo imposed by women). It is at its maximum among chiefs and elders, who use it to monopolize the things that suit them (*ibid.* 77). So religious prohibition becomes the right of property and administrative regulation.

II

Thus far the negative cult has impressed us as a system of abstentions. It seems capable only of inhibiting activity, not stimulating and invigorating it. And yet, by an unexpected reversal of this inhibiting effect, it exercises a positive and highly important influence on the religious and moral nature of the individual.

Indeed, because of the barrier that separates the sacred from the profane, man can enter into intimate relations with sacred things only by ridding himself of what is profane in him. He cannot live a religious life of any intensity unless he begins by withdrawing more or less completely from secular life. The negative cult is, in a sense, a means to an end: it is the condition of access to the positive cult. Not restricted to protecting sacred beings from ordinary contact, it acts on the worshipper himself and modifies his state in a positive way. Afterward, the man who has submitted to prescribed prohibitions is not the man he was. Before, he was an ordinary being who, for this reason, had to keep at a distance from religious forces. Afterward, he is on a more equal footing with those forces, since he has approached the sacred merely by distancing himself from the profane. He has been purified and sanctified by detaching himself from the base and trivial things that were weighing down his nature. Negative rites thus confer efficacious powers, as do positive rites; both can serve to raise the religious *tonus* of the individual. It has been rightly observed that no one can engage in a religious ceremony of any importance without submitting to a kind of preparatory initiation that introduces him gradually into the sacred world.¹ This can take the form of anointings, purifications, and blessings—all essentially positive operations. But the same result can be achieved through fasts, vigils, retreat, and silence, that is, by ritual abstinences that are nothing more than the practical application of specific prohibitions.

When we are looking at specific, isolated instances of negative rites, their positive influence is generally too trivial to be easily seen. But there are circumstances when a whole system of prohibitions is concentrated on a single head; in this case, their effects accumulate and become more manifest. This is what happens in Australia during the initiation rite. The neophyte is subjected to an extreme variety of

¹ See Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice', in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions* (Paris: Alcan, 1909), 22 ff.

negative rites. He must withdraw from the society in which he has spent his life, and from almost all human society besides. He is not only barred from seeing women and the uninitiated,¹ but he must go away to live in the bush, far from his peers, under the direction of several elders who serve as his godfathers. [. . .] For him this time is a period of abstinence of all kinds. Many foods are forbidden; he is allowed only the amount of nourishment that is strictly necessary to sustain life. [. . .] Likewise, he sleeps only as much as is necessary. He must abstain from speaking unless he is spoken to; he uses gestures to indicate his needs. All recreation is prohibited. He must not wash himself; at times he must not move. He lies on the ground, immobile, without clothing of any sort. The result of these multiple prohibitions is to bring about a radical change of status in the initiate. Before the initiation, he was living with women; he was excluded from the cult. Henceforth he is admitted into the society of men; he takes part in the rites, he has acquired a sacred character. The metamorphosis is so complete that it is often represented as a second birth. People imagine that the young man's formerly profane character is now dead, that it was killed and removed by the god of initiation—Bunjil, Baiame, or Daramulun—and that an entirely different individual has taken the place of the one that no longer exists. So we can grasp in this instance, in the flesh, the frequently positive effects of negative rites. Of course, we do not mean to claim that these negative rites alone produce this great transformation; but surely they make a large contribution to it.

In the light of these facts, we can understand what asceticism is, what place it occupies in religious life, and the source of the powers widely attributed to it. Indeed, there is no prohibition whose observance is not ascetic to some degree. To abstain from something useful, or from a form of activity that, since it is habitual, must answer to some human need, is of necessity to impose discomfort and renunciation on oneself. This becomes asceticism proper when these practices develop in such a way that they become the basis of a true way of life. Normally, the negative cult serves only as an introduction and preparation for the positive cult. But sometimes it goes beyond this subordination to the highest level, and the system of

¹ Howitt, *Native Tribes*, 560, 657, 659, 661. Even a woman's shadow must not fall on him (*ibid.* 633). What he touches cannot be touched by a woman (*ibid.* 621).

prohibitions is inflated and exaggerated to the point of invading all of life. Thus systematic asceticism is born, which is merely a hypertrophied version of the negative cult. [. . .] The pure ascetic is a man who raises himself above men and acquires a particular holiness through fasting, vigils, retreat, and silence, in a word, through privations more than through acts of positive piety (offerings, sacrifices, prayers, and so on). History shows, moreover, what religious prestige can be achieved this way: the Buddhist saint is essentially an ascetic, and he is equal or superior to the gods.

It follows that asceticism is not, as we would have thought, a rare, exceptional, and almost abnormal product of religious life; on the contrary, it is one of its essential elements. Every religion contains an ascetic kernel, for there is none without a system of prohibitions. The only difference between cults in this regard is that this kernel is more or less highly developed. Still, it should be added that probably no religion exists in which this development does not take on, at least temporarily, the characteristic features of asceticism proper. This takes place at certain critical periods, when in a relatively short time an individual must be made to undergo a serious change of status. Then, so as to introduce him more rapidly into the circle of sacred things with which he must be put in contact, he is violently separated from the profane world. This does not occur without increased abstinence and an extraordinary intensification of the system of prohibitions. This is exactly what happens in Australia at the moment of initiation. In order to transform boys into men, they are made to live as ascetics. Mrs Parker calls them, very aptly, the monks of Baiame.

But abstinences and privations are not without suffering. We cling to the profane world with all the fibres of our sensual being—our very life depends on it. Not only is it the natural theatre of our activity, it penetrates us from every direction; it is part of us. We cannot, then, detach ourselves from it without doing violence to our nature, without painfully offending our instincts. In other words, the negative cult cannot be developed without inflicting suffering. Pain is one of its necessary conditions. So people were led to consider pain to be a rite in itself; suffering was seen as a state of grace that had to be sought and sustained, even artificially, because of the powers and privileges it confers by the same right as those systems of prohibitions it naturally accompanies. [. . .]

Many of the rites that are practised during initiations involve

systematically inflicting specific suffering on the neophyte so as to modify his status and endow him with the distinguishing qualities of manhood. [. . .] Among the Arunta, the first rite of initiation consists of tossing the subject in a blanket; the men throw him into the air, catch him when he falls, then throw him up again.¹ In the same tribe, at the close of this long series of ceremonies, the young man stretches out on a bed of leaves with live coals underneath; he continues to lie still amid suffocating heat and smoke. [. . .] It is true that all these practices are often presented as ordeals meant to test the neophyte's mettle and determine whether he is worthy of being admitted into religious society. But in reality, the probationary function of the rite is only another aspect of its efficacy. For the way he submits to this ordeal proves that it has indeed been effective, namely that it has conferred the qualities that are its primary justification.

In other cases, these ritual torments are performed not on the body as a whole, but on a particular organ or tissue, the goal being to stimulate its vitality. [. . .] We are sure, in any case, that the purpose of the cruel rites of circumcision and subincision is to confer particular powers on the genital organ. Indeed, the young man is not allowed to marry until he has submitted to these practices; hence he owes special virtues to them. This unique initiation is indispensable because in all lower societies the union of the sexes is marked by a religious character. It is thought to set in motion awesome forces that man cannot approach without danger, unless he has acquired the necessary immunity through ritual procedures.² This is the purpose

¹ Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 214 ff. We see by this example that the rites of initiation sometimes display all the features of hazing. Hazing is in fact a true social institution that arises spontaneously whenever two groups, unequal morally and socially, find themselves in close contact. In this case, the one that considers itself superior to the other resists the intrusion of the newcomers, reacting against them in a way that makes them feel this experienced superiority. This reaction, which is automatic and naturally takes the form of more or less serious sorts of maltreatment, is meant at the same time to mould the individuals to their new existence, to assimilate them to their new setting. Therefore, it constitutes a kind of initiation. We understand, then, that on its side, the initiation constitutes a sort of hazing. The group of elders is superior in religious and moral dignity to the young men, and yet they must assimilate them. All the conditions of hazing are therefore present.

² Information on this question is to be found in my article 'La Prohibition de l'inceste et ses origines' (*L'Année sociologique*, 1 (1898), 1 ff.), and in Alfred Ernest Crawley, *The Mystic Rose* (London: Macmillan, 1902), 37 ff.

of a whole series of positive and negative practices, of which circumcision and subincision are the prototypes. By painfully mutilating an organ, one gives it a sacred character, for this enables it to resist equally sacred forces that it could not otherwise confront.

We said at the beginning of this work that all the essential elements of religious life and thought must be found, at least in embryonic form, in the most primitive religions; the preceding facts confirm this assertion. If there is a belief that is thought peculiar to the most recent and most idealistic religions, it is the notion that pain has a sanctifying power. Yet, this same belief is at the basis of the rites that have just been examined. Of course, it is understood differently depending on the historical moments under consideration. For the Christian, pain is thought to act above all on the soul, which is purified, ennobled, and spiritualized. For the Australian it is thought to act most effectively on the body, increasing its vital energies, making the beard and hair grow, and strengthening the limbs. But in either case, the principle is the same. Whether among Christians or Australians, pain is thought to generate exceptional powers. And this belief is not unfounded. Indeed, the way he braves pain is the best indication of the greatness of man. Never does he rise more brilliantly above himself than when he subdues his nature and makes it follow a path contrary to its inclinations. By so doing, he singles himself out from among all other creatures who go blindly where pleasure calls, and he gives himself a special place in the world. Pain is the sign that certain ties that bind him to the profane world are broken; because it is proof that he has partially freed himself from this world, it is considered an instrument of deliverance. And the man who is delivered in this way is not the victim of pure illusion when he believes that he is endowed with a kind of mastery over things: he has truly risen above them merely by renouncing them; he is stronger than nature because he has silenced it.

Moreover, this virtue has more than an aesthetic value: it is at the basis of all religious life. Sacrifices and offerings are not without privations that exact a price from the faithful. While rites do not require payment in material things, they take his time and his energy. To serve the gods, he must forget himself; to make a proper place for them in his life, he must sacrifice his profane interests. The positive cult is possible, then, only if man is led to practise renunciation, abnegation, detachment from the self, and consequently suffering.

He should not dread suffering—he can even accomplish his duties joyfully if he embraces it to some degree. But to do this, he must be fit for it, and ascetic practices exist to this end. The sufferings they impose are not, therefore, arbitrary and sterile cruelties, but a necessary discipline in which man is shaped and tempered, in which he acquires the qualities of disinterestedness and endurance without which there is no religion. Indeed, to achieve this result, it helps if the ascetic ideal is embodied pre-eminently in particular figures, whose speciality is, as it were, to represent this aspect of ritual life. For they are like living models that stimulate effort. Such is the historical role of the great ascetics. When their acts and deeds are analysed in detail, we wonder what useful end they serve. It is striking how extreme they are in their professed contempt for all that usually excites men's passions. But these extremes are necessary to sustain in the faithful a sufficient disgust for easy living and ordinary pleasures. An elite must set the goal too high so that the masses should not set it too low. Some must go to extremes so that the average man should stay at an appropriate level.

But asceticism serves other purposes than religious ones. Here, as elsewhere, religious interests are only social and moral interests in symbolic form. The ideal beings to whom cults are addressed are not the only ones to demand of their supplicants a certain contempt for pain. Society, too, is only possible at this price. While exalting the powers of man, it is often hard on individuals: of necessity it demands perpetual sacrifice. It does unceasing violence to our natural appetites, precisely because it raises us above ourselves. So that we may fulfil our duties toward society, we must be prepared to violate our instincts at times—to go against the grain of our natural inclinations. Thus, there is an asceticism that is inherent in all social life and destined to survive all mythologies and dogmas; it is an integral part of all human culture. And fundamentally, that is the rationale and justification for the asceticism that religions have taught in every era.

III

Having examined the system of prohibitions with its negative and positive functions, we must now discover how it arose.

In a sense, it is logically implicit in the very notion of the sacred.

Everything that is sacred is an object of respect, and every feeling of respect is translated into inhibitions by the person who feels it. Because it inspires such emotion, a respected being, in fact, is always expressed in consciousness by a representation that is charged with a high dose of mental energy. Consequently, this representation is armed to stave off any other representation that contradicts it, whether wholly or in part. The sacred world sustains an antagonistic relationship to the profane world. They correspond to two forms of life that are mutually exclusive, or at least that cannot be lived at the same moment with the same intensity. We cannot be entirely devoted to the ideal beings to which the cult is addressed, and at the same time entirely devoted to ourselves and our material interests—entirely to the collectivity and entirely to our egos. These are two systems of conscious states that are directed, and direct our conduct, toward two opposite poles. The more powerful tends to push the other out of consciousness. When we think of holy things, the idea of a profane object cannot come to mind without finding resistance—something in us opposes letting it in. It is the representation of the sacred that does not tolerate this nearness. But this psychic antagonism, this mutual exclusion of ideas must naturally issue in the exclusion of corresponding things. So that the ideas should not coexist, the things must not touch each other or be in any way related. This is the very principle of prohibition.

Moreover, the world of the sacred is by definition a world apart. Since in every respect mentioned above it is opposed to the profane, it must be treated in an appropriate way: we misunderstand the nature of the sacred and confuse it with what it is not if, in our relations with sacred things, we use the gestures, language, and attitudes that serve us in our relations with those that are profane. We are free to handle profane things and we speak freely to secular beings, therefore we will not touch sacred beings, or we will touch them only cautiously; and we will not speak in their presence, or we will not speak in ordinary language. All that is usual in our dealings with one must be excluded from our dealings with the other.

But while this explanation is not inaccurate, it is still insufficient. In fact, there are many beings who are objects of respect without being protected by systems of strict prohibitions like those we have described. Of course, the mind has a general tendency to locate different things in different settings, especially when they are

incompatible. But the profane world and the sacred world are not only distinct, they are closed to one another—there is a gulf between them. In the nature of sacred beings, then, there must be a particular reason for this state of exceptional isolation and mutual occlusion. And in fact, paradoxically, the sacred world is prone by its very nature to infiltrate that same profane world it otherwise excludes. Even as it repels it, it tends to flow into it as soon as it comes near. This is why they must be kept apart from one another and a kind of gulf must be maintained between them.

These precautions are made necessary by the extraordinary contagiousness of the sacred. Far from remaining attached to the things marked as its own, the sacred is endowed with a kind of fluidity. Even the most superficial or indirect contact is enough to extend sacredness from one object to the other. Religious forces are imagined in such a way that they always seem ready to escape from the places they reside and to invade everything within their reach. The nanja tree, where the spirit of an ancestor lives, is sacred for the individual who is considered the reincarnation of that ancestor. But every bird who stops to rest on that tree participates in the same character: touching the bird is equally forbidden. We have already had occasion to show how simple contact with a *churinga* is adequate to sanctify people and things; moreover, it is on this principle of the contagiousness of the sacred that all rites of consecration are based. The holiness of the *churingas* is such that their influence is even felt at a distance. We remember how it extends not only to the cave where they are kept but to the whole neighbouring region, to the animals who take shelter there and which it is forbidden to kill, as well as to the plants that grow nearby and must not be touched. [. . .]

This contagiousness of the sacred is too well known to need demonstration by numerous examples; we merely wanted to establish that it is as true of totemism as it is of more advanced religions. Once verified, it easily explains the extreme strictness of the prohibitions that separate the sacred from the profane. By virtue of this extraordinary power of expansion, the slightest contact, the least proximity—whether material or simply moral—with a profane being is enough to draw religious forces outside their domain. And since they do this only by contradicting their nature, a whole system of measures is indispensable to maintain the two worlds at a respectful distance from one another. This is why lay people are forbidden

not only to touch but also to see and hear what is sacred, and why these two kinds of life must not mingle in consciousness. Precautions to keep them apart are all the more necessary since, even while opposing each other, they have a tendency to merge.

While we understand the multiplicity of these prohibitions, we also understand how they function and the sanctions attached to them. As a consequence of the inherent contagiousness of sacred things, a profane being cannot violate a prohibition without the religious force that he has improperly approached extending itself to him and establishing its rule over him. But since there is antagonism between him and that force, he finds himself subject to a hostile power, whose hostility must take the form of violent reactions that aim to destroy him. This is why sickness or death are considered natural consequences of every transgression of this kind; and these are consequences that are thought to be automatic, a sort of physical necessity. The guilty man feels invaded by a force that dominates him and against which he is helpless. Has he eaten some of the totemic animal? He feels it penetrate inside him and gnaw at his entrails; he lies down on the ground and waits for death. Every profanation implies a consecration, but one that is dreadful to the consecrated person and even to those who come near him. It is the aftermath of this consecration that in part sanctions the prohibition.¹

It will be noticed that this explanation of prohibitions does not depend on the varying symbols that help us to imagine religious forces. It hardly matters whether they are imagined as anonymous and impersonal energies or embodied in personalities gifted with consciousness and feeling. Of course, in the first instance they are thought to react against profaning transgressions automatically and unconsciously, while in the second they are thought to obey the dictates of passion roused by the offence. Basically, however, these two conceptions—which have the same practical effects—also express one and the same psychic mechanism in two different languages. Both are based on the antagonism of the sacred and the profane, combined with the remarkable aptitude of the first to

¹ We recall that when the prohibition is religious, these sanctions are not the only ones; in addition there is either a punishment, properly speaking, or public condemnation.

contaminate the second. And this antagonism and this contagiousness act in the same way, whether the sacred character is attributed to blind forces or to conscious minds. So, it is far from true that religious life proper begins only with mythic personalities, since we see that in this case the rite is the same, whether or not religious entities are personified. [. . .]

IV

But while the contagiousness of the sacred helps to explain the system of prohibitions, how do we explain this contagiousness itself?

People believed they could account for it by the well-known laws ruling the association of ideas. The feelings inspired in us by a person or a thing are extended contagiously from the idea of that person or this thing to the representations with which they are associated, and subsequently to the objects that these representations express. The respect we have for a sacred being is therefore communicated to everything that touches it, to everything that resembles it and reminds us of it. Of course, the cultivated man is not fooled by these associations; he knows that these derivative emotions are simple plays of images, entirely mental combinations, and he does not give in to the superstitions that these emotions tend to evoke. But, it is said, the primitive naively objectifies his impressions without subjecting them to criticism. Does something inspire him with reverent fear? He concludes that it really does contain a majestic and awesome force; so he maintains a safe distance from this thing and treats it as if it were sacred, though it has no right to that designation.¹

However, this explanation neglects the fact that the most primitive religions are not alone in attributing this power of propagation to the sacred. Even the most recent religions have a set of rites that rest on this principle. Every consecration by anointing or washing transfers the sanctifying virtues of a sacred object to a profane one. Yet it is difficult to regard today's enlightened Catholic as a kind of belated savage who continues to be duped by his association of ideas, with nothing in the nature of things to explain and justify these ways of

¹ See F. B. Jevons, *An Introduction to the History of Religion* (London: Methuen, 1896), 67-8.

thinking. Besides, it is quite arbitrary to endow the primitive with this tendency to objectify all his emotions blindly. In his ordinary life, in the details of his secular occupations, he does not impute to a thing the properties of its neighbour, or vice versa. If he is less enamoured than we of clarity and distinctions, it is far from true that he has some inherent and deplorable aptitude for mixing and merging things. It is just that religious thought has a distinct penchant for fusions of this kind. Therefore, we must seek the source of these predispositions in the special nature of religious things, and not in the general laws of human intelligence.

When a force or a property seems to us to be an integral part, a constituent element, of the thing it informs, we have trouble imagining that it can detach itself and transport itself elsewhere. A body is defined by its mass and its atomic composition; and we do not imagine that it can communicate any of its distinctive features through contact. But on the other hand, if we are speaking of a force that has entered the body from the outside, something that is not attached to it, something alien to it, it is not unthinkable that it might escape. So the heat or electricity any object has received from an external source can be transmitted to the surrounding setting. The mind readily accepts the possibility of this transmission. The extreme ease with which religious forces radiate and become diffused is therefore not in the least surprising if they are generally conceived as external to the beings in which they reside. And that is indeed implicit in the theory we have proposed.

This theory consists, in fact, of transfigured collective forces, that is, moral forces. They are made of ideas and feelings that awaken in us the spectacle of society, not of the sensations that come to us from the physical world. They are different in kind from the tangible things in which we locate them. Indeed, they can borrow the external and material forms in which they are represented from these things, but they owe them none of their power. Such forces maintain no internal bonds to the various supports on which they come to rest; they have no roots in these things. Using a word that we have already used,¹ and which can best characterize them, *they are superimposed*. And no object is exclusively predestined to receive

¹ See above, p. 174.

them; the most trivial, the most ordinary object can play this role: chance circumstances determine which is chosen. [. . .]

If religious forces have no proper place of their own, however, their mobility can be easily explained. Since nothing binds them to their material form, they are naturally inclined to fly off at the slightest contact, in spite of themselves as it were, and propagate elsewhere. Their intensity stimulates this highly favoured propagation. That is why the soul itself, while bound to the body by very personal ties, always threatens to leave it: all the body's openings are paths by which the soul tends to spread out and become diffused outside it.

But we shall more effectively account for the phenomenon we are trying to understand if, instead of considering the already established notion of religious forces, we go back to the mental process that formed it.

We have seen that the sacred character of an entity does not inhere in any of its intrinsic attributes. [. . .] Religious feelings are constituted by impressions of consolation and dependence which society's influence provokes in one's consciousness. Through such impressions, these emotions are not tied to the idea of any specific object, but because they are emotions and they are particularly intense, they are also eminently contagious. They are like a drop of oil that spreads to all the other mental states that occupy the mind at the time. They especially penetrate and contaminate representations that come to express the various objects a man has in his hands or before his eyes at the same time: the totemic drawings that cover his body, bull-roarers in his possession, rocks that surround him, the ground beneath his feet, and so on. In this way these objects themselves take on a religious value which is not really inherent in them but is conferred upon them from the outside. Therefore, contagion is not a kind of secondary procedure by which the sacred character, once acquired, is propagated; it is the very process by which it is acquired. Sacredness sets in by contagion, so it is not surprising that it is transmitted by contagion as well. A special emotion gives it reality; it is attached to an object because this emotion has encountered that object on its path. Therefore it is natural that it should spread from that object to all those it finds in proximity, that is, to all those that for any reason, physical contiguity or mere similarity, have come close to the original object in one's mind.

Thus the contagiousness of the sacred is explained by the theory of religious forces that we have proposed, and thereby confirms it.¹ At the same time, it helps us to understand a feature of the primitive mentality to which we have called attention previously.

We have seen how easily the primitive confuses the different kingdoms of nature and sees the most heterogeneous things as identical—men, animals, plants, stars, and so on. We now understand one of the causes that has most contributed to facilitating these confusions. Because religious forces are eminently contagious, the same principle is always found to animate the most disparate things: it passes from one to the other either by simple physical proximity or by quite superficial similarities. So men, animals, plants, and rocks are thought to participate in the same totem: the men because they bear the animal's name; the animals because they resemble the totemic emblem; the plants because they provide nourishment for the animals; the rocks because they are found in the place where ceremonies are celebrated. Now, religious forces are then considered the source of all efficacy; beings who had the same religious principle therefore must have appeared to have the same essence, and to differ from one another only in secondary features. That is why it seems quite natural to place them in the same category and to see them merely as varieties of the same genus, hence reciprocally transmutable.

This established relationship sheds a new light on the phenomena of contagion. Taken in themselves, they seem to be alien to logical life. Do they not mingle and fuse disparate beings, despite their natural differences? But we have seen that these fusions and participations have played a logical and highly useful role: they have served to connect things that sensation leaves quite separate. It is far from true, then, that contagion, the source of these yokings and minglings, is marked by that kind of fundamental irrationality which one is at first inclined to attribute to it. It opens the way to future scientific explanations.

¹ It is true that this contagiousness is not unique to religious forces; magical forces have the same property, and yet it is clear that they do not correspond to objectified social feelings. But this is because magical forces have been conceived on the model of religious forces. We shall return at length to this point (see p. 268).

CHAPTER 2

THE POSITIVE CULT

I. THE ELEMENTS OF SACRIFICE

DESPITE the importance of the negative cult and its indirectly positive effects, this is not its intrinsic rationale; it is an introduction to religious life, but it presupposes more than it constitutes that life. It enjoins the worshipper to flee the profane world so that he may approach the sacred. Man has never imagined that his duties toward religious forces could be reduced to a simple abstention from all involvement. He always thought that he maintained positive and bilateral relations with those forces, relations that are regulated and organized by a set of ritual practices. We shall call this special system of rites the *positive cult*.

For a long time we were almost entirely ignorant of what the positive cult involves in totemic religion. We knew a little about rites of initiation, and yet our knowledge of these was inadequate. But Spencer and Gillen's observations of the tribes of central Australia, anticipated by Schulze and confirmed by Strehlow, have in part filled this gap in our data. There is one celebration in particular that these explorers liked to depict for us that indeed seems to dominate the whole totemic cult: this is what the Arunta, according to Spencer and Gillen, call the *Intichiuma*. [. . .]

The date on which the *Intichiuma* takes place depends largely on the season. In central Australia, two clearly defined seasons exist: the dry season, which lasts a long time; and the rainy season, which is by contrast short and irregular. As soon as the rains have come, the plants sprout as if by magic, the animals multiply, and the countryside, which only yesterday was sterile desert, is quickly covered with luxuriant flora and fauna. The *Intichiuma* is celebrated just when the good season seems about to arrive. [. . .]

Each totemic group has, in fact, its own *Intichiuma*. But while the rite is a general practice in central Australia, it is not the same everywhere. [. . .] Though to tell the truth, the different mechanisms employed are too closely related to one another to be able to be dissociated completely. [. . .]

I

The celebration consists of two successive phases. The rites practised in the first phase are meant to ensure the prosperity of the animal or plant species that serves as the clan totem. The means employed to this end can be reduced to several main types.

We recall that the fabulous ancestors from which each clan is thought to descend formerly lived on the earth and left traces of their passage. These traces consist notably of stones or rocks that they left in certain places or that would have been formed at spots where they sank into the ground. These rocks and stones are regarded as the bodies or body parts of the ancestors whose memories they preserve; they represent the ancestors. Consequently, they also represent the animals and plants that served as totems to these ancestors, since an individual and his totem are one. So they are endowed with the same reality, the same properties as the animals or plants of the same kind living today. But they have the great advantage over these living things of being imperishable, of knowing neither sickness nor death. So they constitute a permanent, immutable, and ever-available store of animal and plant life. In certain cases, people go annually to draw on this store to ensure the reproduction of the species.

Here, for example, is how the Witchetty Grub clan carries out its Intichiuma at Alice Springs.

On the day set by the chief, all the members of the totemic group gather at the main camp. The men of other totemic groups withdraw some distance away, for among the Arunta they are prohibited from being present at the celebration of a rite that has all the features of a secret ceremony. [. . .]

Once the members of the totem are gathered, they set off, leaving only two or three men back at the camp. Completely naked, unarmed, without any of their usual ornaments, they go forward one after the other in total silence. Their attitude and pace are marked by religious solemnity: the act in which they are taking part has, in their eyes, an exceptional importance. And until the end of the ceremony they are made to observe a strict fast.

The land they cross is filled with mementoes left by glorious ancestors. They arrive at a place where a large block of quartz is sunk into the ground and surrounded by small, round stones. The block

represents the witchetty grub in its adult state. The *Alatunja** strikes it with a kind of small wooden bucket called *apmara*, while at the same time he intones a chant inviting the animal to lay eggs. He does the same with the stones, which represent the animal's eggs, and he rubs the belly of every participant with both. This done, they all walk down toward the foot of a rock that is equally celebrated in the myths of the Alcheringa, at whose base another stone is found that also represents the witchetty grub. The *Alatunja* strikes it with his *apmara*; the men who accompany him do the same with gum tree branches, which they have gathered along the way, while continuing to chant the previous invitation addressed to the animal. Nearly ten different places are visited in succession, several of which are often situated a mile apart. In each of them, in the depths of a sort of cave or hole, there is some stone that is thought to represent the witchetty grub in one of its aspects or one of the phases of its development, and the same ceremonies are repeated with each of these stones.

The meaning of the rite is obvious. The *Alatunja* strikes the sacred stones to lift some dust from them. The grains of this sacred dust are regarded as the seeds of life; each of them contains a spiritual principle that, incorporated into an organism of the same species, will give birth in it to a new being. The tree branches carried by the participants serve to disperse this precious dust in all directions; it flies off on every side to do its work of fertilization. By this means people believe they have ensured the abundant reproduction of the animal species protected by the clan and on which it depends. [. . .]

A slightly different method is used for the plain-dwelling Kangaroo. Some kangaroo dung is collected and wrapped in a certain grass that this animal is very fond of and that therefore belongs to the Kangaroo totem. The wrapped dung is then placed on the ground between two layers of the same grass and set on fire. Tree branches are lit from the rising flame and then shaken so that the sparks fly off in all directions. These sparks play the same role as the dust in the previous case.

In a certain number of clans men mix something of their own substance with the substance of the stone to make the rite more efficacious. The young men open their veins and let their blood spurt onto the rock. [. . .] The purpose of this practice is in a sense to

revitalize the powers of the stone and to reinforce its efficacy. Indeed, it must not be forgotten that the men of the clan are kin to the plant or animal whose name they carry; the same life principle resides in them, and especially in their blood. So it is natural to make use of this blood and the mystic seeds it carries to ensure the regular reproduction of the totemic species. When a man is sick or tired, it is usual among the Arunta that one of his young companions will open his veins and sprinkle him with his blood to revive him. If blood can reawaken life in a man this way, it is not surprising that it may also serve to awaken it in the animal or plant species with which the men of the clan are fused. [. . .]

In several cases, the main vitalizing agent is the same substance they are trying to produce. Among the Kaitish, in the course of a rain-making, water is sprinkled on a sacred stone that represents the mythic heroes of the Water clan. It is clear that by this means people believe they are increasing the productive powers of the stone, just as is done with blood and for the same reasons. Among the Mara, the celebrant goes to draw water from a sacred hole, drinks it, and spits in all directions. Among the Worgaia, when the yams begin to sprout, the chief of the Yam clan sends the men of the phratry to which he does not belong himself to gather the plants; they bring some back to him and ask him to intervene so that the species may develop properly. He takes one, bites into it, and spits the pieces in all directions. Among the Kaitish, when—after various rites that we will not describe—a certain grain called *erlipinna* has reached maturity, the chief of the totem brings a little of it to the men's camp and grinds it between two stones. The men piously gather up the flour obtained this way and several grains are placed on the chief's lips: he blows, dispersing them in all directions. Since the chief possesses a special sacramental power, this contact with his mouth is certainly meant to stimulate the vitality of the seeds these grains contain. Propelled to every corner of the horizon, they will communicate their fertilizing properties to the plants.

For the native, the efficacy of these rites is never questioned; he is convinced that they must inevitably produce the results he expects. If, in the event, his hopes are dashed, he simply concludes that they were counteracted by the evil deeds of some hostile group. In any case, it does not occur to him that a favourable result might be obtained by other means. If, by chance, the vegetation sprouts or the

animals reproduce before he can participate in the Intichiuma, he imagines that another Intichiuma was celebrated, underground, by the souls of the ancestors, and that the living are reaping the benefits of this subterranean ceremony.

II

This is the first act of the festival.

In the period that immediately follows, there is no ceremony properly speaking. Yet religious life remains intense, made manifest by an exaggeration of the ordinary system of prohibitions. It is as though the sacred character of the totem is reinforced, so it is less likely to be touched. While in normal times the Arunta can eat the animal or plant that is their totem, provided this is done in moderation, after the Intichiuma this right is suspended; the dietary prohibition is strict and unconditional. It is believed that any violation of this prohibition would neutralize the beneficial effects of the rite and stop the increase of the species. It is true that the members of other totemic groups who find themselves in the vicinity are not subject to the same prohibition. However, at this moment they are less free than usual. They cannot consume the totemic animal anywhere at all, for example in the brush, but must bring it to the camp, which is the only place it may be cooked.

A final ceremony brings these extraordinary prohibitions to an end and definitively brings this long series of rites to a close. It varies slightly among the different clans, but the essential elements are always the same. These are two of the main forms it takes among the Arunta, one among the Witchetty Grub clan, the other among the Kangaroo.

Once the caterpillars are fully grown and appear in abundance, the people of the totem, as well as others, go out to gather as many of them as possible. Then everyone brings what they have found to the camp and cooks them until they become hard and crunchy. The products of this cooking are then preserved in wooden vessels called *pitchi*. [. . .] The *Alatunja* takes one of these *pitchi* and, with the aid of his companions, grinds its contents between two stones. Afterward, he eats a little of the resulting powder, his assistants do the same, and the rest is distributed to the people of the other clans who can then freely dispose of it. The same procedure is followed for the

supply made by the *Alatunja*. From this moment on, the men and women of the totem can eat it, but only a little; for if they surpassed the prescribed amount, they would lose the necessary powers to celebrate the Intichiuma, and the species would not reproduce itself. And if they ate none at all, and especially if, under the circumstances just described, the *Alatunja* totally abstained from eating it, they would be struck with the same incapacity.

In the totemic group of the Kangaroo, which is based in Undiara, certain features of the ceremony are marked in a more obvious way. After the rites we have described are completed on the sacred rock, the young men go out to hunt the kangaroo and bring their game back to the men's camp. There, the elders, among them the *Alatunja*, eat a little of the animal's flesh and smear the bodies of those who took part in the Intichiuma with its fat. The rest is shared among the assembled men. Then, the people of the totem decorate themselves with totemic drawings, and the night is spent in chants that recall the exploits accomplished by the kangaroo men and animals in the time of the Alcheringa. The following day, the young men return to hunt in the forest, bringing back more kangaroos than the first time, and the ceremony is performed again.

With variations in detail, we find the same rite in other Arunta clans. [. . .] Some specimens of the totemic plant or animal are presented to the chief of the clan, who solemnly eats it as he is obliged to do. If he did not perform this duty, he would lose his power to celebrate the Intichiuma effectively, that is, to recreate the species each year. Sometimes, the ritual consumption is followed by an anointing done with the fat of the animal or certain parts of the plant. Generally, the rite is then repeated by the men of the totem, or at least by the elders, and once it is accomplished the exceptional prohibitions are lifted.

III

The system of rites that has just been described is of interest because it contains, in the most elementary form now known, all the essential principles of a great religious institution that was destined to become one of the foundations of the positive cult in the more advanced religions—the institution of sacrifice.

We know how revolutionary the works of Robertson Smith have

been in the traditional theory of sacrifice.¹ Until his contribution, sacrifice was seen as merely a sort of tribute or homage, whether compulsory or freely offered, analogous to those that subjects owe to their princes. Robertson Smith was the first to observe that this classic explanation did not account for two essential features of the rite. First of all, it is a meal, consisting of foodstuffs. Moreover, it is a meal in which the faithful who offer it take part along with the god to whom it is offered. Certain parts of the victim are reserved for the deity; others are distributed to the sacrificers, who consume them. This is why, in the Bible, the sacrifice is sometimes called a meal eaten before Yahweh. And meals eaten in common are thought in many societies to create a bond of artificial kinship among the participants. Kin are, in fact, beings naturally created of the same flesh and blood. But food constantly refashions the substance of the organism. A common food can therefore produce the same effects as a common origin. According to Robertson Smith, the purpose of sacrificial banquets is precisely to make a communion in flesh between the worshipper and his god, to establish a bond of kinship between them. From this point of view, sacrifice appeared in a completely new light. Its essence, then, was no longer—as it was long believed—the act of renunciation which the word ‘sacrifice’ ordinarily expresses, but above all an act of dietary communion.

Of course, this way of explaining the efficacy of sacrificial banquets might need qualification in some details. It is not, for instance, exclusively the result of sharing a meal. Man is sanctified not only because he eats, as it were, at the same table as the god, but above all because the food he consumes at this ritual meal has a sacred character. We have shown, indeed, how, in sacrifice, a whole series of preliminary operations—washings, anointings, prayers, and so on—transform the animal that must be destroyed into a holy thing, whose holiness is then communicated to the faithful who eat it.² None the less, dietary communion is one of the essential elements of sacrifice. Now, going back to the rite that provides closure to the Intichiuma ceremonies, it too consists of such an act. Once the totemic animal is killed, the *Alatunja* and the elders solemnly eat it. In this way they

¹ See William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (2nd edn., London: A. & C. Black, 1894), lectures VI to XI, and the article ‘Sacrifice’ in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

² See Hubert and Mauss, ‘Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice’, 40 ff.

commune with the sacred principle residing in the animal and they literally incorporate that principle. The difference here is that the animal is sacred naturally, whereas they acquire this quality only artificially in the course of the sacrifice.

Moreover, the purpose of this communion is quite clear. Every member of a totemic clan bears within him a sort of mystic substance that constitutes the pre-eminent part of his being—the essence of his soul. From his soul he draws the powers he attributes to himself and his social role; his soul is the source of his personhood. Therefore he has a vital interest in preserving it intact, in maintaining it as much as possible in a state of perpetual youth. Unfortunately, all forces, even the most spiritual, are worn away over time if nothing comes along to restore the energy they lose in the natural course of things. This creates a primary need that is, as we shall see, the underlying reason for the positive cult. The members of a totem can remain themselves, then, only if they periodically restore the totemic principle that is in them. And since they imagine this principle in plant or animal form, they will ask that corresponding plant or animal for the supplementary forces they need to renew and rejuvenate that principle. A man of the Kangaroo clan thinks and feels he is a kangaroo; he defines himself by this quality and it marks his place in society. To preserve it, he incorporates some of the flesh of this animal into his own substance from time to time. A few bites are enough, in accordance with the rule: *the part is as good as the whole*.¹

Yet, for this operation to produce the best possible results, it must not take place at just any moment. The most opportune time is when the new generation has just completed its development, for this is also the moment when the forces that animate the totemic species fully blossom. They have only just been extracted from those rich reservoirs of life that are the sacred trees and rocks. Moreover, every means has been used to enhance their intensity—this is the purpose of the rites performed during the first part of the Intichiuma. In any case, the first fruits of the harvest manifest in their very appearance the energy they contain; the totemic god affirms himself in every burst of youth. That is why from time immemorial the first fruits have been considered sacred food, reserved exclusively for holy beings. So it is natural for the Australian to help himself to these for

¹ For an explanation of this rule, see above, p. 174.

the purpose of spiritual regeneration. This explains the date and circumstances of the ceremony.

Perhaps it seems surprising that such sacred food is consumed by mere secular beings. But [. . .] there is no positive rite that does not in essence constitute a real sacrilege; for man cannot deal with sacred beings without crossing the line that usually keeps them apart. The important thing is that the sacrilege be accomplished with mitigating precautions. Among those employed, the most usual consist of preparing for the transition and introducing the faithful into the circle of sacred things only slowly and gradually. [. . .] This is essentially a religious period, which the participants cannot undergo without a transformation in their religious status. The fasts, the contact with sacred rocks, the *churingas*, the totemic decorations, and so on have gradually conferred on them a character they did not have previously, and which allows them to approach this desired and dreaded food, which would be prohibited to them in ordinary times, without shocking and dangerous profanation.¹

If the act by which a sacred being is offered up and then eaten by those who worship it is called a sacrifice, then the rite that has just been discussed is entitled to the same name. Besides, its striking resemblance to other practices encountered in a great many agrarian cults makes its meaning quite clear. Indeed, it is a general rule, even among peoples who have attained a high degree of civilization, that the first fruits of the harvest are the stuff of ritual meals—the paschal meal being the best-known example. Moreover, since agrarian rites are at the basis of the most advanced forms of the cult, we see that the Intichiuma of the Australian societies is closer to us than we might have thought, given its apparent crudeness.

By a stroke of genius, Robertson Smith intuited these facts without knowing them. By a series of ingenious deductions—which there is no need to reproduce here since they are of merely historical interest now—he thought he could establish that originally, the animal offered up in the sacrifice must have been considered semi-divine and close kin to those who offered it. And these are exactly the same features that define the totemic species. Robertson Smith also came to assume that totemism must have known and practised a rite

¹ We should not lose sight of the fact that among the Arunta, it is not completely forbidden to eat the totemic animal.

quite similar to the one we have just examined. [. . .] We have just seen that in an impressive number of societies, totemic sacrifice is or was practised as Robertson Smith imagined it. Of course, we have no proof that this practice is necessarily inherent in totemism, or that it is the seed from which all other types of sacrifice have sprung. But while the universality of the rite is hypothetical, its existence is no longer in dispute. It must henceforth be regarded as established that the most mystic form of dietary communion is encountered in the most rudimentary form of religion known today.

IV

On another point, however, the new facts available to us undermine Robertson Smith's theories.

According to him, communion was not only an essential element of the sacrifice but, at least in the beginning, it was the only element. Not only was it misguided to reduce sacrifice to a mere tribute or offering, but the very idea of an offering was initially absent from it. This idea was introduced only later, under the influence of external circumstances, and masked the true nature of this ritual mechanism rather than contributing to our understanding of it. Indeed, Robertson Smith believed that the notion of oblation itself was too crude an absurdity for it to be seen as the underlying reason for such a great institution. One of the most important functions of the divinity is to ensure the foods necessary for man's survival. Therefore, it would seem impossible that sacrifice should consist of a presentation of foods to the divinity. It seems contradictory that the gods should expect their nourishment from man, when it is through them that he is nourished. How could they need his help to take their fair portion of the things he receives from their hands? From these considerations, Robertson Smith concluded that the idea of the sacrifice-offering could have been conceived only in the great religions, in which the gods were disengaged from the things with which they were fused in primitive times and imagined as rather like kings, eminent proprietors of the earth and its products. From that time, Robertson Smith thought, sacrifice was assimilated to the tribute that subjects pay to their prince, in exchange for rights conceded to them. But this new interpretation was, in reality, a modification and even a corruption of the primitive idea. For 'the idea of property

materializes everything it touches'. By being introduced into the notion of sacrifice, it distorts it and turns it into a kind of bargain between man and the deity.¹

The facts we have set forth derail this argument. The rites we have described certainly count among the most primitive that have ever been observed. No clear, mythic personality has yet appeared in them; there are no gods or spirits, properly speaking, but only vague, anonymous, and impersonal forces. And yet the reasoning they presuppose is precisely the reasoning Robertson Smith declared to be impossible because of its absurdity.

Let us go back to the first act of the Intichiuma, to the rites that are meant to ensure the fecundity of the animal or plant species that serves as totem to the clan. This species is the sacred thing par excellence; it embodies the essence of what we could call, metaphorically, the totemic divinity. We have seen, however, that in order to perpetuate itself, this species needs man's help. It is he who dispenses life to the new generation each year; without him, it would not see the light of day. If he stopped celebrating the Intichiuma, the sacred beings would disappear from the face of the earth. It is therefore from him, in a sense, that they take their life; and yet, in another sense, it is from them that he takes his. For once they have reached maturity, he will borrow from them the forces necessary to sustain and restore his spiritual being. So, we can say that it is man who makes his gods, or at least makes them endure, but at the same time it is through them that he himself endures. Thus he regularly closes the circle that, according to Smith, would be implied in the very notion of sacrificial tribute: he gives the sacred beings a little of what he receives from them, and receives from them everything he gives.

There is more. The offerings he must make each year do not differ in nature from those that will be made later in sacrifices proper. If the sacrificer offers up an animal, it is so that the life principle within it may disengage from the organism and ascend to feed the divinity. Similarly, the dust fragments that the Australian detaches from the sacred rock are so many principles he disperses into space to animate the totemic species and ensure its renewal. The gesture by which this dispersal is made is also that which normally accompanies offerings. In certain cases, the resemblance between the two rites is found even

¹ Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 390 ff.

in the specific movements performed. We have seen that the Kaitish spill water on a sacred stone to bring rain; among certain peoples, the priest spills water on the altar for the same purpose. [. . .]

Now we see in what sense it is permissible to say that the Intichiuma contains the seeds of the sacrificial system. In its fully constituted form, sacrifice is composed of two essential elements: an act of communion and an act of offering. The worshipper communes with his god by ingesting a sacred food, and at the same time he makes an offering to this god. We find these two acts in the Intichiuma, as it has just been described. The only difference is that in the sacrifice proper¹ they are done simultaneously, or in quick succession, whereas in the Australian ceremony they are separated. [. . .] The Intichiuma, taken as a whole, is the sacrifice, but its parts are not yet joined and organized. [. . .]

This helps us to understand better the nature of sacrifice itself. First of all, the equal importance of the two elements that enter into it has been firmly established. If the Australian makes offerings to his sacred beings, there is no reason to assume that the idea of oblation was alien to the primitive organization of the sacrificial institution and disturbed its natural economy. Robertson Smith's theory must be revised on this point. Of course, sacrifice is in part a process of communion; but it is also, and no less crucially, a gift, an act of renunciation. It always assumes that the worshipper abandons to the gods something of his substance or his goods. Any attempt to subtract one of these elements from the other is futile. Perhaps the offering is even more permanent than communion.

Secondly, it seems generally the case that sacrifice, and especially sacrificial offering, can be addressed only to personal beings. Yet, the offerings we have just encountered in Australia imply no notion of this kind. This means that sacrifice is independent of the varying forms in which religious forces are conceived; it stems from deeper causes, which we shall investigate below.

However, it is clear that the act of offering naturally awakens in people's minds the idea of a moral subject which this offering is meant to satisfy. The ritual gestures that we have described become more intelligible when we believe that they are addressed to

¹ At least when it is complete. In a sense, it can be reduced to a single one of these elements.

personalities. The practices of the Intichiuma, while activating only impersonal powers, lead the way to a different conception. Granted, they were not sufficient to evoke fully the idea of mythic personalities. But once the idea took shape, the very nature of these rites drew it into the cult. Similarly, it became less speculative; mingled more directly with action and with life, it took on more reality. It is credible, then, that—doubtless as a secondary but still noteworthy effect—the practice of the cult favoured the personification of religious forces.

V

We have yet to explain the contradiction that Robertson Smith saw as inadmissibly illogical.

If sacred beings always manifested their powers in a perfectly balanced way, it would indeed seem inconceivable that man could have thought to offer them his services, since they would appear to have no need of them. But first, as long as they are fused with things and seen as containing the principles of cosmic life, they too are subject to its rhythms. That life proceeds in successive oscillations according to a fixed law. At times it asserts itself in all its glory; at others it is so weak that one wonders if it will continue. Every year, the plants die. Will they be reborn? The animal species tend to diminish through natural or violent death. Will they renew themselves in time and in the proper way? The rain, especially, is capricious; there are long periods when it seems to have disappeared altogether. These periodic collapses of nature bear witness to the fact that in corresponding epochs, the sacred beings on which the animals, plants, rain, and so on depend pass through the same critical states; so they, too, have their periods of collapse. But man cannot watch these spectacles as a neutral witness. So that he may live, universal life must continue, and therefore the gods must not die. He tries to sustain them, to help them; for this reason, he puts at their service the forces available to him, which he mobilizes for that purpose. The blood that flows in his veins has fecundating powers: he will spill it. He will take the seeds of life that sleep in his clan's sacred rocks and he will sow them in space. In short, he will make offerings.

These external and physical crises are matched, moreover, by

internal and mental crises that tend to have the same result. Sacred beings exist only because they are imagined as such. If we cease to believe in them, they will cease to exist.¹ [. . .] If we think of them less keenly, they count less for us and we count less on them; they exist to a lesser degree. Again, from this point of view man's services are necessary to them. This second reason for helping them is even more important than the first, for it has existed throughout the ages. [. . .]

Moreover, it is because the gods depend on man's thoughts that he can believe that his help is effective. The only way of rejuvenating the collective representations of sacred beings is to steep them once again in the very source of religious life—in the assembled groups. The emotions provoked by these periodic crises of external things make the men who witness them determined to reunite and consult one another on an appropriate course of action. But they find mutual comfort in the very fact of assembling; they find the remedy because they seek it together. Common faith is naturally revived in the bosom of the reconstituted collectivity; it is reborn because it is rediscovered in the same conditions in which it was born. Once restored, it easily triumphs over all the private doubts that surfaced in individual minds. The image of sacred things recovers strength enough to resist the internal or external causes that tended to weaken it. Despite their apparent collapse, it is no longer believed that the gods will die since people feel them revive deep within themselves. However crude, the methods used to help the gods cannot seem futile since everything seems to be proof of their efficacy. People feel more confident because they feel stronger, and they really are stronger because the forces that were languishing have been reawakened in their minds.

We must refrain, then, from believing, along with Robertson Smith, that the cult was exclusively instituted for the benefit of men, and that the gods have no use for it; they need it as much as their faithful. Certainly, without the gods, men could not live. But on the other hand, the gods would die if the cult were not celebrated. The purpose of the cult, then, is not only to bring profane subjects into

¹ In a philosophical sense, the same is true of anything, for nothing exists except by representation. But as we have shown (pp. 172–3), the proposition is doubly true of religious forces because there is nothing in things that inherently corresponds to the sacred character.

communion with sacred beings, but also to sustain those sacred beings in life, to restore them and ensure their perpetual regeneration. Of course, the material offerings do not produce this renewal through their own virtues, but through the mental states that these otherwise futile manœuvres awaken or accompany. The true rationale of these cults, even the most seemingly materialistic, must not be sought in the gestures they prescribe but in the internal and moral renewal these gestures help to bring about. What the worshipper really gives his god is not the food he places on the altar, or the blood he spills from his veins, but his thought. Still, there is an exchange of mutually invigorating good deeds between the divinity and his faithful. The rule *do ut des*,* by which the principle of sacrifice has sometimes been defined, is not a late invention of utilitarian theorists; it simply makes explicit the mechanism of the sacrificial system itself and, more generally, of the whole positive cult. The circle Robertson Smith indicated is therefore quite real, but there is nothing about it that shames the rational mind. It comes from the fact that sacred beings, while superior to men, can live only in human consciousness.

This circle will seem even more natural to us and we will understand its meaning and rationale better if we push our analysis further and, substituting for religious symbols the realities they express, examine how these realities are used in the rite. If, as we have tried to establish, the sacred principle is nothing but society hypostasized* and transfigured, it should be possible to interpret ritual life in secular and social terms. And indeed, like ritual life, social life moves in a circle. On the one hand, the individual takes from society the best of himself, everything that gives him a distinctive personality and a place among other beings, his intellectual and moral culture. Take away language, the sciences, the arts, and moral beliefs, and he falls to the level of brutishness. The characteristic attributes of human nature therefore come to us from society. But on the other hand, society exists and lives only in and through individuals. Extinguish the idea of society in individual minds, let the beliefs, traditions, and aspirations of the collectivity cease to be felt and shared by the particular people involved, and society will die. We can therefore repeat here what was said above with respect to the divinity: society has reality only to the extent that it has a place in human consciousness, and we make this place for it. We now perceive the underlying reason why the gods can no more do without their faithful than the

faithful can do without their gods. For society, of which the gods are merely the symbolic expression, can no more do without individuals than individuals can do without society.

Here we reach the bedrock on which all cults are built and which has ensured their endurance as long as human societies have existed. When we see what rites consist of and where they seem to lead, we wonder with amazement how men could have conceived them and, indeed, remained so faithfully attached to them. Where could they have come up with the illusion that with a few grains of sand tossed to the wind, with a few drops of blood spread on a rock or on the stone of an altar, it was possible to sustain the life of an animal species or a god? [. . .] In order to justify our view of the efficacy attributed to rites as something other than the product of humanity's chronic delirium, we must be able to establish that the cult really does periodically recreate a moral entity on which we depend, as it depends on us. And this entity does exist: it is society.

In fact, if religious ceremonies have any importance, it is because they set the collectivity in motion—groups gather to celebrate them. Their first effect, then, is to bring individuals together, to increase contacts between them, and to make those contacts more intimate. This in itself causes a change of consciousness. During ordinary days, utilitarian and individual occupations are uppermost in people's minds. Each one devotes himself to his personal task. For most people this involves satisfying the necessities of physical life, and the chief motive of economic activity has always been private interest. Of course, social feelings would not be entirely absent. We remain in relationship with our fellow men; the habits, ideas, and tendencies that education has instilled in us and which normally preside over our relations with others continue to make their influence felt. But they are constantly countered and held in check by antagonistic tendencies, which the demands of the daily struggle awaken and sustain. They resist more or less successfully, depending on their intrinsic energy; but this energy is not renewed. They live on their past, and consequently they would dwindle over time if nothing came along to restore the strength they lose in these incessant conflicts and friction. When the Australians, dispersed into small groups, hunt or fish, they lose sight of the concerns of their clan or tribe: they think only of catching as much game as possible. On holidays, in contrast, these preoccupations are forcibly eclipsed;

since they are essentially profane, they are excluded from sacred periods. What then occupies their thoughts are common beliefs, common traditions, the memories of great ancestors, the collective ideal of which they are the incarnation—in short, social things. Even the material interests that the great religious ceremonies are meant to satisfy are public in nature, and hence social. The whole society is interested in the abundance of the harvest, in timely but not excessive rainfall, in the regular multiplication of the animals. Society, then, is foremost in people's minds; it dominates and directs their conduct; which amounts to saying that at this time society is more alive, more active, and consequently more real than in ordinary times. [. . .] The individual soul is regenerated, too, by immersing itself once more in the wellspring of its life; subsequently, it feels stronger, more in control of itself, less dependent on physical necessities.

We know that the positive cult naturally tends to take periodic forms, that is one of its distinctive characteristics. Of course, there are rites that man celebrates occasionally, to deal with transient situations. But these episodic practices never play more than an accessory role, and even in the religions we are studying in this book, they are rather exceptional. The essence of the cult is the cycle of festivals that regularly recur at fixed periods. We are now able to understand the source of this periodicity; the rhythm religious life obeys merely expresses the rhythm of social life and results from it. Society can revive its sense of itself only by assembling. But it cannot remain perpetually in session. The demands of life do not allow this indefinitely; so it disperses in order to reassemble anew when, once again, it feels the need to do so. These necessary alternations correspond to the regular alternation of sacred and profane time. Because the initial purpose of the cult seems, at least, to be to regularize the course of natural phenomena, the rhythm of cosmic life has marked the rhythm of ritual life. This is why festivals have long been seasonal events; we have seen that this was already characteristic of the Australian Intichiuma. But the seasons provided only the external framework of this organization, not the principle on which they rest; for even cults that have exclusively spiritual aims have remained periodic. And this periodicity must have other causes. Since seasonal changes are critical times in nature, they are a natural occasion for gatherings and, consequently, for religious ceremonies. But other

events could play, and have indeed played, the role of occasional causes. It must be recognized that this framework, however purely external, is evidence of a singular force of resistance; for traces of it are found in religions that are furthest removed from any physical basis. Many Christian festivals are connected, without any break in continuity, to the pastoral and agrarian festivals of the ancient Hebrews, although in themselves they have no vestige of any agrarian or pastoral content. [. . .]

CHAPTER 3

THE POSITIVE CULT (Continued)

II. MIMETIC RITES AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CAUSALITY

THE methods just discussed are not the only ones used to ensure the fertility of the totemic species. There are others with the same purpose that either accompany them or take their place.

I

In the same ceremonies we have described, various rites are often performed that are meant to supplement or consolidate the effects of blood or other sacrifice. These rites consist of cries and gestures meant to imitate the different postures or aspects of the animal whose reproduction the clan is hoping to ensure. For this reason we call these rites *mimetic*.

Among the Arunta, the Intichiuma of the Witchetty Grub clan involves not only the rites performed on sacred rocks, as mentioned before. When these are completed, the participants set off on their return to the camp. When they are around a mile away, however, they stop to decorate themselves ritually, then resume their march. The decorations that now adorn them announce that an important ceremony is about to take place. And, indeed, while the group was away, one of the old men left to guard the camp has built a shelter of long, narrow branches called *Umbana*, which represents the chrysalis from which the insect emerges. Those who have taken part in the prior ceremonies gather near the place where this construction has been made; then they go forward slowly, stopping from time to time, until they arrive at the *Umbana* and go inside. Immediately, all those who do not belong to the phratry of the Witchetty Grub totem, but who are witnessing the scene from a distance, lie face down on the ground. They must stay in this position, without moving, until they are allowed to get up. During this time, a chant rises from within the *Umbana* telling of the different phases the animal passes through in the course of its development, and of the myths concerning the sacred rocks. When this chant stops, the *Alatunja*, still crouching,

glides out of the *Umbana* and slowly advances along the ground in front of it. He is followed by all his companions, who reproduce his gestures; these are clearly meant to imitate the insect emerging from its chrysalis. At the same moment, a chant is heard that is like an oral commentary on the rite which consists of a precise description of the movements made by the animal at this stage of its development. [. . .]

Spencer and Gillen again point out several analogous if less important practices among the Arunta. For example, in the Emu clan's *Intichiuma*, the actors try to reproduce this bird's look and manner in their behaviour. In the Water clan's *Intichiuma*, the members of the totem give the characteristic cry of the plover, a cry that they naturally associate with the rainy season. [. . .] In Strehlow's work, such examples are too numerous to cite; there are hardly any ceremonies in which the imitative gesture is not noted. According to the nature of the totems whose festival is celebrated, they jump like kangaroos and imitate their motions while eating; they imitate the flight of winged ants, the characteristic sound of bats, the cry of the wild turkey, the cry of the eagle, the hissing of the snake, the croaking of the frog, and so on. When the totem is a plant, they gesture as though picking it or eating it. [. . .]

Living beings are not the only ones they attempt to imitate. In many tribes, the *Intichiuma* of the Rain clan basically consists of imitative rites. One of the simplest is performed among the Urabunna. The head of the clan, decorated with white down and holding a lance in his hands, sits on the ground. He moves around in every direction, probably to remove the down stuck to his body, and scatters it in the air to represent clouds. In this way he is imitating the cloud-men of the Alcheringa who, according to legend, used to climb up to the sky and form rain clouds. In short, the purpose of the rite is to represent the formation and ascent of rain-bearing clouds. [. . .]

II

All these rites belong to the same category. Their underlying principle is also found, among others, at the basis of what is commonly—and improperly—called sympathetic magic.

These principles ordinarily fall into two groups.¹

The first may be stated as follows: *whatever touches an object also touches everything in any relationship of proximity or solidarity with that object*. Thus, whatever affects the part affects the whole; every influence exerted on an individual is transmitted to his neighbours, to his relatives, to everyone with whom he is connected in any way. All these cases are simple applications of the law of contagion, which we examined previously. Any given state or quality, good or bad, is communicated contagiously from one subject to another with whom there is any relationship.

The second principle is usually summed up by the formula *like produces like*. The representation of a being or a state produces that being or that state. This maxim sets in motion the rites that have just been described, and its main features can best be grasped during their performance. The classic example of casting spells, usually offered as the typical application of this precept, is much less significant. Indeed, casting spells largely involves a simple phenomenon of transference. The idea of the image is associated in people's minds with the idea of the model; the effects of the act performed on the statuette are then communicated contagiously to the person whose features it reproduces. In relation to the original, the image plays the role of the part in relation to the whole: it is an agent of transmission. And so people believe they can obtain the same result by burning the hair of the person they want to affect. The only difference between these two sorts of operations is that in one, communication is made by way of similarity, in the other, by way of contiguity.

The rites that concern us are quite different. They presuppose not only the shift of a given state or quality from one object to another, but the creation of something entirely new. The mere fact of representing the animal generates that animal and creates it; by imitating the sound of wind or falling water, the clouds are made to form and dissolve in rain, and so on. Certainly resemblance plays a role in both cases, but in very different ways. When a spell is cast, resemblance merely turns the influence exerted in a particular direction; it guides a force that is not its own. In the rites in question, resemblance acts

¹ On the subject of this classification, see J. G. Frazer, *Lectures on the Early History of Kingship* (London: Macmillan, 1905), 37 ff.; Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, 'Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie', *L'Année sociologique*, 7 (1904), 61 ff.

by itself and is directly efficacious. Also, contrary to the usual definitions, what really differentiates the two principles of so-called sympathetic magic and its corresponding practices is not that contiguity acts in one and resemblance in the other, but that in the first there is simply contagious communication, whereas in the second there is production and creation.¹

To explain mimetic rites, then, is to explain the second of these principles, and vice versa. [. . .]

So instead of consolidating the principle on which it rests in its general and abstract form, let us place it back in the moral setting in which we have just observed it and reconnect it to the web of ideas and feelings that generate the rites in which it figures. Then we will have a better understanding of its causes.

The men who gather to perform these rites really believe that they are the animals or plants of the species whose name they bear. They feel they have either an animal or a vegetable nature, and they believe it is this nature that constitutes what is most essential and most excellent in them. Once assembled, their first act must then be to affirm to one another this quality by which they define themselves. The totem is their rallying sign, and for this reason, as we have seen, they draw it on their body; but it is just as natural for them to try to resemble the totem in their movements, their cries, and their behaviour. Since they are emus or kangaroos, they behave like the animals of that name. By this means they offer mutual testimony that they are members of the same moral community, and they become conscious of the kinship that unites them. The rite is not only an expression of this kinship, but it fashions or refashions it. For it exists only insofar as it is believed, and all these collective demonstrations have the effect of supporting the beliefs on which this kinship rests. So these leaps, cries, and movements of all sorts, bizarre and grotesque as they seem, have a meaning that is, in reality, quite human and profound. The Australian tries to resemble his totem just as the worshipper in more advanced religions tries to resemble his god. For both, this is a way of communing with the sacred being, that is, with the collective ideal it symbolizes. This is a primary form of *ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ*.*

¹ We are not speaking about what is called the law of contraries. As Hubert and Mauss have shown, the contrary produces its contrary only by means of its like ('Esquisse', 70).

However, since this first cause involves what is most specific in totemic beliefs, if it were the only cause, the principle of *like produces like* could not have survived totemism. Yet there is perhaps no religion in which rites derived from it are not found. So another cause must accompany this one.

Indeed, the ceremonies in which we have seen it applied have a purpose beyond the very general one we have just recalled, essential as it is. They have, in addition, a more immediate and conscious goal, which is to ensure the reproduction of the totemic species. The idea of this necessary reproduction therefore haunts the minds of the faithful, becoming the intense focus of their will and attention. Now, such a preoccupation cannot obsess a group of men to this extent without being externalized in a material form. Since everyone is thinking about the animal or plant with whose fate the clan is allied, it is inevitable that this common thought should manifest itself outwardly through gestures, and those most marked for this role represent this animal or that plant in one of its most characteristic forms. For there are no movements that so closely conform to the idea that fills the group's consciousness at that moment, since these movements are its immediate and nearly automatic expression. People do their best, then, to imitate the animal: they cry like it, they jump like it, they reproduce scenes in which the plant is put to daily use. All these methods of representation are so many ways of outwardly marking the goal on which all minds are focused, of saying, calling, and evoking the thing they want to bring about. And this need is not bound to a particular moment in time, it does not depend on the beliefs of this or that religion; it is essentially human. This is why, even in religions that are very different from the one we are studying, worshippers who gather together to ask their gods for something they ardently desire are compelled to represent it. Certainly speech is another way of expressing it, but the gesture is no less natural: it bursts quite spontaneously from the body, coming even before speech, or, at any rate, along with it.

But if we can now understand how these gestures have become part of the ceremony, we must still explain the power ascribed to them. If the Australian regularly repeats them at every new season, it is because he believes they are necessary to the success of the rite. Where does he get the idea that by imitating an animal he can influence its reproduction?

Such an obvious mistake seems scarcely comprehensible as long as we see the rite merely in terms of its apparent material goal. But we know that beyond its imagined effect on the totemic species, it exerts a profound influence on the souls of the faithful who take part. They relate it to an impression of well-being that is quite justified, though its causes are unclear. People are conscious that the ceremony is good for them; and indeed, in it they refashion their moral being. How could this sort of euphoria fail to give them the feeling that the rite has succeeded, that it was what it was supposed to be, that it achieved its goal? And since the only goal consciously pursued was the reproduction of the totemic species, this seems to be assured by the means employed, whose efficacy is thus demonstrated. So men came to attribute creative powers to gestures that are, in themselves, useless. The moral efficacy of the rite, which is real, creates belief in its physical efficacy, which is imaginary; the efficacy of the whole leads to belief in the efficacy of each part, taken separately. The truly useful effects that the ceremony as a whole produces act as an experimental justification of discrete practices, while in reality all these practices are in no way indispensable to its success. Indeed, proof that these practices do not act by themselves is that they can be replaced by others of a very different kind without modifying the final outcome. [. . .]

This state of mind is easy for us to understand since we can observe it around us. Especially among more cultivated peoples and societies, believers are often encountered who, while having doubts about the special efficacy that dogma attributes to each rite taken separately, continue none the less to practise their religion. They are not sure that the prescribed observances are justifiable in detail, but they feel that they could not dispense with them without falling into an undesired moral confusion. The very fact that among them faith has lost its intellectual roots lays bare its deeper rationale. This is why facile critiques, which sometimes submit ritual prescriptions to a simplistic rationalism, generally leave the faithful quite indifferent. This is because the true justification of religious practices is not in their apparent ends but in the invisible influence they work on consciousness, in the way they affect our mental state. Similarly, when preachers try to convince someone, they devote much less energy to establishing directly, and through methodical proofs, the truth of a particular proposition or the usefulness of this or that observance,

than to awakening or reawakening the feeling of moral comfort that the regular celebration of the cult provides. They create a predisposition for belief which precedes proofs, leads the intelligence to bypass the inadequacy of logical reasons, and prompts it to go, as if on its own, beyond the propositions it is asked to accept. This favourable prejudice, this leap to believe, is precisely what constitutes faith; and it is faith that gives authority to rites in the believer's view, whoever he is—Christian or Australian. The Christian is superior only in his greater consciousness of the psychic process that results in his belief; he knows 'that we are saved by faith'.

Because faith originates in this way, it is, in a sense, 'impervious to experience'.¹ If the intermittent failures of the Intichiuma do not shake the Australian's confidence in his rite, this is because he clings with all the strength of his soul to these practices in which he periodically renews himself. He could not possibly deny them in principle without causing an upheaval of his entire being, which resists this. But great as this force of resistance may be, it does not radically distinguish the religious mentality from other forms of human mentality, even those usually considered its opposites. In this regard, the mentality of the scientist differs only in degree. When he endows a scientific law with the authority of numerous and varied experiments, it is contrary to all method to renounce it too easily upon the discovery of a fact that seems to contradict it. He must still make sure that this fact bears only one interpretation, and that he cannot account for it without abandoning the proposition it seems to invalidate. Now, the Australian proceeds no differently when he attributes the failure of an Intichiuma to some sorcery, or the abundance of a premature harvest to some mystic Intichiuma celebrated in the other world. He is all the more justified in not doubting his rite on the basis of a contrary fact since the value of that rite is, or seems to be, established by a much greater number of supporting facts. First of all, the moral efficacy of the ceremony is real, and this is directly experienced by everyone who participates in it. This experience is constantly repeated, and no contradictory experience can diminish its reach. Moreover, even its physical efficacy finds a less apparent confirmation in the data of objective observation. In effect, it is

¹ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris: Alcan, 1910), 61–8.

normal for the totemic species to reproduce itself regularly; so in most cases everything happens as if the ritual gestures really had produced the desired and expected effects. The failures are the exception. Since rites, especially periodic rites, demand nothing more of nature than that it should follow its regular course, it is not surprising that most often it seems to obey them. So if the believer happens to be resistant to certain lessons of experience, this is because he is relying on other experiences that seem more conclusive. The scientist does no differently; he is merely more methodical.

Magic is not, then, as Frazer claimed,¹ a primary fact from which religion is merely a derivative form. Quite the contrary, it is under the influence of religious ideas that the precepts are constituted on which the magician's art is based, and these have been applied to purely secular matters only through a secondary extension. Because all the forces of the universe have been conceived on the model of sacred forces, the inherent contagiousness of these forces was extended to the others, and people believed that, under certain conditions, all the properties of the body could be transmitted by contagion. Similarly, once the principle of 'like produces like' was articulated to satisfy specific religious needs, it was detached from its ritual origins and became, through a sort of spontaneous generalization, a law of nature.² But in order to understand these fundamental maxims of magic, it is necessary to place them back in the religious settings in which they emerged and which alone allow us to account for them. When they are regarded as the work of isolated individuals, of solitary magicians, one wonders how human minds could have such an idea, since nothing in experience could either suggest or verify it. Above all, we cannot explain how such a deceiving art could impose itself for so long on man's trust. But the problem disappears if the faith that inspires magic is merely a particular case of religious faith in general, if it is itself the product, at least indirectly, of a collective effervescence. [. . .]

The results of our analysis, then, confirm the conclusions of

¹ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1890), i. 69-75.

² We do not mean to say that there was a time when religion existed without magic. Probably, as religion was formed, certain of these principles were extended to non-religious relations, and it was thus complemented by a magic that was more or less developed. But if these two systems of ideas and practices do not correspond to distinct historical phases, there is none the less a definite relationship of derivation between them. This is all we have proposed to establish.

Hubert and Mauss when they studied magic directly.¹ They have shown that magic was something entirely different from a crude industry based on distorted science. Behind the magician's manipulations, which appear to be purely secular, Hubert and Mauss have revealed a whole background of religious conceptions, a whole world of forces that magic borrowed from religion. Now we can understand why magic is so full of religious elements: it was born from religion.

III

The principle just explained does not have a merely ritual function but bears directly on the theory of knowledge. Indeed, it is a concrete expression of the law of causality, and very likely one of its most primitive expressions. A whole conception of the causal relationship is implied in the power that is thus attributed to 'like produces like'; and this conception dominates primitive thought since it serves as the basis of both cultic practices and the techniques of the magician. The origins of the precept on which mimetic rites rest can therefore clarify the origins of the principle of causality. The genesis of the first must help us to understand the genesis of the second. Now, we have just seen that the precept underpinning mimetic rites is a product of social causes: groups elaborated this precept with a view to collective ends, and it translates collective feelings. We can therefore assume that the same is true of the origins of the principle of causality.

To verify that this is indeed the origin of the disparate elements that make up the principle of causality, it is enough to analyse that principle itself.

The very first thing that is implied in the notion of a causal relationship is the idea of efficacy, of productive power, of active force. The concept of cause is commonly understood to mean that which is likely to produce a specific change. Cause is force before it has demonstrated its power; effect is the same power actualized. Humanity has always imagined causality in dynamic terms. Of course, certain philosophers* refuse to grant this concept any objective value; they see it as merely an arbitrary construct of the

¹ Hubert and Mauss, 'Esquisse', 108 ff. [Actually, pp. 131-87.]

imagination that corresponds to nothing in things themselves. But for the moment our task is not to wonder whether or not it is based in reality; we need only affirm that it exists, that it constitutes and has always constituted an element of communal mentality, and this is recognized even by its critics. Our immediate goal is to discover, not its logical value, but how it can be explained.

It derives from social causes. Analysis of the facts has already allowed us to see that the prototype of the idea of force was *mana*, *wakan*, *orenda*, the totemic principle—various names given to the collective force as it is objectified and projected onto things. Indeed, the first power men have imagined as such seems, therefore, to be the power that society exerted on its members. Reasoning confirms this result of observation. It is possible, in fact, to establish why this notion of power, of efficacy, of active force cannot come from another source.

First, it is obvious and widely acknowledged that we could not possibly deduce this notion from external experience. The senses allow us to see only phenomena that coexist or follow one another, but sensory perception cannot give us the idea of that controlling and determining action that is characteristic of what is called a power or a force. The senses apprehend only states that are realized, acquired, external to one another. But the internal process that connects these states escapes them. Nothing they teach us could suggest the idea of influence or efficacy. It is precisely for this reason that the philosophers of empiricism have regarded these different conceptions as so many mythological aberrations. But even assuming that these are all merely hallucinations, we must still account for their genesis. [. . .]

It has often been thought that the act by which our will concludes a deliberation, reins in our inclinations, and rules our bodies could have served as a model for this construct. In volition, it was said, we grasp ourselves directly as power in action. It seems that once man had this idea, he needed only to extend it to things to create the concept of force.

As long as the animist theory passed for a demonstrable truth, this explanation could appear to be confirmed by history. If the forces with which human thought primitively peopled the world had really been minds, that is, personal and conscious beings more or less like man, it might be thought that our individual experience was enough

to provide us with the constitutive elements of the notion of force. But we know that the first forces men imagined were, on the contrary, anonymous, vague, diffuse powers that resemble cosmic forces in their impersonality and so contrast in the clearest way with that eminently personal power, human will. So they could not have been conceived in its image. [. . .]

The concept of causality, then, suggests that the idea of force must have a dual character. First, it can come to us only from inner experience; moral forces are necessarily the only ones we can touch directly. At the same time, they must be impersonal, since the notion of impersonal power came first. Now, the only forces that satisfy this dual condition are those that arise from our common life—collective forces. On the one hand, they are entirely psychic, made up exclusively of objectified ideas and feelings. But on the other hand, they are by definition impersonal, since they are the product of cooperation. Since they are the work of all, they belong to no one in particular. They belong so little to the personality of the subjects they inhabit that they are never fixed there. Just as they enter from the outside, they are always ready to detach themselves. They have an inherent tendency to spread out and invade new territory. As we know, nothing is more contagious and, as a result, more communicable.

Of course, physical forces have the same property, but we cannot be directly conscious of this. We cannot even perceive them as such, because they are external to us. When I run up against an obstacle, I experience a sensation of irritation and discomfort; however, the force that causes this sensation is not in me but in the obstacle, and so it is outside the circle of my perception. We perceive its effects; we do not touch it in itself. Social forces are a different matter: they are part of our inner life and consequently we not only know the products of their action, we also see them act. The force that isolates the sacred being and holds the profane at a distance is not, in reality, in this being; it lives in the consciousness of the faithful. [. . .]

Furthermore, the idea of force openly bears the mark of its origin. Indeed, it implies an idea of power that includes mastery, domination, and their correlatives, dependence and subordination. Now, the relations that all these ideas express are eminently social. It is society that has classified beings as superior and inferior, as masters who give orders and subjects who obey; it is society that has conferred

on the masters that singular quality that makes their orders efficacious and constitutes *power*. So everything would indicate that the first powers the human mind could imagine are those that societies established as they became organized. It is in their image that the powers of the physical world were conceived. And man could manage to conceive of himself as a dominating force of the body in which it resides only by introducing concepts borrowed from social life into the idea he created of himself. In fact, he had to distinguish himself from his physical double and attribute to himself a sort of superior dignity in relation to it. In short, he had to think of himself as a soul. And indeed, he has always imagined the force he believes himself to be in the form of the soul. But we know that the soul is something quite different from a name given to the abstract faculty of moving, thinking, or feeling; it is above all a religious principle, a particular aspect of the collective force. In short, man feels he is a soul and consequently a force because he is a social being. [. . .]

But the notion of force is not the whole principle of causality. This principle includes a judgement that every force develops in a specific way, that its state at any given moment of its evolution predetermines the next state. The first state is called 'cause', the second 'effect', and causal judgement asserts the existence of a necessary link between these two moments of any force. The mind posits this relationship in advance of any proof, bound by a kind of constraint that it cannot break through. It postulates this relationship, as we say, *a priori*.

Empiricism has never succeeded in accounting for that apriorism and that necessity. The philosophers of this school could not explain how an association of ideas, reinforced by habit, could produce anything but a state of expectation, a greater or weaker predisposition for ideas to come to mind in a certain order. But the principle of causality has an entirely different character. It is not simply an inherent tendency of our thought to unfold in a certain way; it is a norm that is external and superior to the flow of our representations, which it dominates and rules absolutely. It is invested with an authority that binds the mind and goes beyond it; this means that the mind is not its creator. [. . .]

The rites just studied allow us to glimpse a generally unsuspected source of this authority. Let us recall how the causal law that imitative rites put into practice was born. The group assembles in the grip

of the same preoccupation: if the species whose name it bears does not reproduce, the clan is lost. The common sentiment that animates all its members, then, is translated outwardly in the form of specific gestures that are always the same in the same circumstances; and once the ceremony is completed, the desired outcome seems to be achieved—for the reasons explained above. An association is then formed between the idea of this outcome and the idea of the gestures that preceded it. And this association does not vary from one subject to another; it is the same for all those who participate in the rite, since it is the product of a collective experience. However, if no other factor intervened, it would produce merely a collective expectation; after completing the mimetic gestures, everyone would more or less trustingly expect to see the desired event come next. This would not be sufficient to engender an imperative rule of thought.

Since a social interest of primary importance is at stake, however, society cannot leave things to follow their course at the whim of circumstance; therefore it intervenes actively by regulating the train of events according to its needs. It requires that this ceremony, which it cannot bypass, be repeated whenever necessary, and that the movements that are the condition of success be regularly performed; society makes them obligatory. Now, these movements imply a specific mental attitude that, in response, shares this same obligatory character. To prescribe that one must imitate the animal or plant in order to ensure its rebirth is to pose 'like produces like' as an axiom that cannot be questioned. Opinion cannot allow individuals to deny this principle in theory without allowing them at the same time to violate it in practice. Public opinion therefore imposes it, just as it does the practices that derive from it, and thus the ritual precept is doubled by a logical precept that is merely its intellectual aspect. Both precepts derive their authority from the same source: society. The respect society inspires is extended to the ways of thinking and acting it values. One cannot turn aside from either without running up against the resistance of prevailing opinion. This is why such ways of thinking require intellectual assent before any examination, just as such ways of acting immediately demand submission of the will.

Using this example, we can verify once again how a sociological theory of the notion of causality, and more generally of categories, both departs from the classic doctrines on this question and accords

with them. Along with apriorism, it maintains the prejudicial and necessary character of the causal relationship; but it is not confined to asserting causality; it accounts for it without making it disappear under the pretext of explanation, as empiricism does. Moreover, it does not in any way deny the part played by individual experience. There is no question that, on his own, the individual observes regular sequences of phenomena and thus acquires a certain *sensation* of regularity. But this sensation is not the *category* of causality. The first is individual, subjective, incommunicable; we create it ourselves from our personal observations. The second is the work of the collectivity and comes to us ready-made. It frames our empirical observations and allows us to think about them—to see them from an angle that allows us to understand each other on the subject. Of course, if the framework applies to the contents, this is because it bears some relation to the material it contains; but it is not to be confused with it. The framework goes beyond the material and dominates it. This is because it has another source. It is not simply a completion of individual memory; it is above all created to answer the needs of communal life.

In sum, the mistake of empiricism was to see the causal connection as merely a scientific construction of speculative thought and the product of a more or less methodical generalization. On its own, pure speculation can generate only provisional, hypothetical views that are more or less plausible but must always be subject to question. For we do not know whether some new observation will come along to invalidate them in the future. An axiom that the mind accepts and is bent on accepting, unreservedly and unconditionally, could not come to us from this source. The necessities of action alone, and especially collective action, can and must be expressed in categorical, peremptory, and decisive formulas that admit no contradiction; for collective movements are possible only on the condition that they are concerted movements, and consequently regulated and defined. They exclude casting about in the dark, which is the source of anarchy; they tend toward an organization that, once established, imposes itself on individuals. And as activity cannot dispense with intelligence, intelligence is led along the same path and adopts without discussion the theoretical postulates that practice requires. The imperatives of thought and the imperatives of will are, in reality, two sides of the same coin.

It is far from our desire, however, to present the preceding remarks as a complete theory of the concept of causality. The question is too complex to resolve in this way. The principle of cause was understood in different ways in different times and places; in the same society it varies with social setting, and with the realms of nature to which it is applied.¹ We cannot determine with sufficient precision the causes and conditions on which it depends after considering only one of the forms this principle has presented historically. The views just articulated must be regarded only as indications that must be tested and completed. However, since the causal law we have just considered is certainly one of the most primitive that exists, and since it has played a major role in the development of human thought and industry, it constitutes a privileged experiment, and so presumably the observations it has allowed us to make may be generalized to some extent.

¹ The idea of cause is not the same for a scientist and for a man lacking all scientific culture. On the other hand, many of our contemporaries understand the principle of causality differently, depending on whether they apply it to social data or to physico-chemical data. People often have a conception of causality as it operates in the social order that is highly reminiscent of the conception that was for so long the basis of magic. We may well wonder whether a physicist and a biologist imagine the causal relation in the same way.

CHAPTER 4

THE POSITIVE CULT (Continued)

III. REPRESENTATIVE OR COMMEMORATIVE RITES

THE explanation we have given of the positive rites just considered in the two preceding chapters attributes a meaning to them that is primarily moral and social. The physical efficacy ascribed to them by the faithful is the product of an interpretation that dissimulates their essential rationale. It is because they provide the moral renewal of individuals and groups that they are thought to have an influence on things. But while this hypothesis has allowed us to account for the facts, it has not been directly demonstrated. It even seems, at first sight, to accord rather poorly with the nature of the ritual mechanisms we have analysed. Whether these consist of offerings or of imitative practices, the gestures that compose them are aimed at purely material ends; their sole purpose is, or seems to be, to provoke the rebirth of the totemic species. Under these conditions, it is surprising that their real role should be to serve moral ends.

Granted, their physical function might have been exaggerated by Spencer and Gillen, even in the most incontestable cases. According to these authors, every clan would celebrate its Intichiuma in order to ensure useful nourishment to the other clans, and the entire cult would consist of a kind of economic cooperation among different totemic groups. Each clan would work for all the others. But according to Strehlow, this conception of Australian totemism is utterly foreign to the native mentality. He says,

If, while doing their utmost to multiply the animals or plants of the consecrated species, the members of a totemic group seem to be working for their fellow men of other totems, we must refrain from seeing this collaboration as the fundamental principle of Arunta or Loritja totemism. Never have the black men themselves told me that the point of their ceremonies was any such thing. Of course, when I suggested this idea to them and explained it, they understood and went along. But no one will blame me if I have a certain mistrust for responses obtained under these conditions.

Strehlow observes, moreover, that this way of interpreting the rite is contradicted by the fact that not all totemic animals or plants are edible or useful; some serve no purpose, and some are even dangerous. The ceremonies could not, then, have a nutritional purpose.¹

Our author concludes: 'When the natives are asked the decisive reason for these ceremonies, they reply unanimously: it is because the ancestors have so instituted things. That is why we act in this way and not some other.'² But to say that the rite is observed because it comes from the ancestors is a recognition that its authority is merged with the authority of tradition, a social matter of the first order. People celebrate it to remain faithful to the past, to preserve the collectivity's moral profile, and not because of the physical effects it can produce. Thus we are given a glimpse of its underlying reasons in the very way that the faithful explain it.

There are cases in which this aspect of the ceremonies is readily apparent.

I

This aspect can be best observed among the Warramunga.³

Among these people, every clan is thought to descend from a single ancestor who, after his birth in a specific place, spent his entire earthly existence travelling around every part of the country. He is the one responsible, in the course of these journeys, for giving the country its present shape; he is the one who made the mountains and the plains, the watering holes and the streams, and so on. At the same time, along the way he sowed the seeds of life that were shed from his body and became, by successive reincarnations, the present members of the clan. Now, among the Warramunga the ceremony that corresponds precisely to the Arunta's Intichiuma is observed for

¹ Carl Strehlow, *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* (Frankfurt: Joseph Baer, 1907), iii, 96.

² *Ibid.* 8.

³ The Warramunga are not the only people among whom the Intichiuma takes the form we are about to describe. It can also be observed among the Tjingilli, the Umbaia, the Wulmala, the Walpuri, and even among the Kaitish, although the Kaitish ceremony is reminiscent in certain respects of that of the Arunta (Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, 291, 309, 311, 317). We take the Warramunga as the type case because they have been studied so well by Spencer and Gillen.

the purpose of commemorating and representing the mythic history of the ancestor. There is no question either of sacrifice or, except in a single case, of mimetic practices. The rite consists exclusively of recalling the past and making it in some way present by means of an actual dramatic representation. This term is all the more apt as the celebrant, in this case, is considered not an incarnation of the ancestor he represents but an actor playing a role.

Here, for example, is the Intichiuma of the Black Snake clan as Spencer and Gillen observed it.¹ [. . .]

These commemorative ceremonies re-enact the mythic history of the ancestor Thalaualla, from the time he emerges from the ground to the moment when he definitively re-enters it. The ceremonies follow him through all his travels. According to the myth, he celebrated the totemic ceremonies in every place he sojourned. These ceremonies are repeated in the same order in which they happened initially. The movement that recurs most often consists of a kind of rhythmic and violent trembling of the whole body: this is how the ancestor shook himself all over in mythic times to shed the seeds of life contained within him. The actors cover their skin with down that sheds and flies off as they shake themselves. This is a way of representing the flight of these mythic seeds and their dispersal into space. [. . .]

Apart from the properly religious ceremonies that the ancestor is thought to have celebrated in former times, simple episodes from his earthly career, whether epic or comic, are also represented. Thus, at a given moment, while three actors are on the stage, busy with an important rite, another hides behind a stand of trees situated at some distance. Around his neck is attached a packet of down that represents a wallaby. When the main ceremony is over, an old man traces a line on the ground that points toward the place where the fourth actor is hidden. The others walk behind, their eyes lowered and fixed on this line, as though they were following a path. When they discover the man, they pretend to be stupefied, and one of them strikes him with a stick. This whole mime represents an incident in the life of the great black snake. One day, his son went off alone to hunt, caught a wallaby, and ate it without giving any to his father. His father followed his tracks, surprised him, and forced him to vomit; this is alluded to by the beating that ends the performance.

¹ *Northern Tribes*, 300 ff.

We will not review here all the mythic events that are represented in sequence. The preceding examples are adequate to show the character of these ceremonies: they are dramas, but of a particular sort, which influence—or are thought to influence—the course of nature. When the commemoration of the Thalaualla is completed, the Warramunga are convinced that the black snakes cannot fail to increase and multiply. These dramas are therefore rites, and even rites that are comparable by virtue of their efficacy with those that constitute the Intichiuma of the Arunta.

And both shed light on one another. Indeed, comparing them is all the more legitimate as there is no discontinuity between them. Not only is their purpose the same, but what is most characteristic of the Warramunga ritual is already found in the Arunta ceremony in an embryonic state. The Intichiuma, as it is generally practised by the Arunta, indeed contains a kind of implicit commemoration. The places where it is celebrated are necessarily those that the ancestors have made famous. The paths taken by the faithful in the course of their pious pilgrimages are those that the heroes of the Alcheringa have taken. The places where they stop to enact the rites are those where the ancestors themselves sojourned, where they disappeared into the ground, and so on. Everything evokes their memory to the minds of the spectators. Furthermore, the physical rites are often complemented by songs that recount ancestral exploits. Let these narratives be mimed instead of told, let them develop in this new form and become the essential part of the ceremony, and we have the Warramunga ceremony. [. . .]

Now, what is peculiar to the Warramunga ceremonies just discussed is that no gesture is made whose immediate objective is to help or promote the rebirth of the totemic species. If we analyse the movements performed as if they were words pronounced, we find in general nothing that reveals any intention of this kind. The form this enactment takes can only serve to resurrect the clan's mythic past. But the mythology of a group is the whole set of its common beliefs. The traditions whose memory this mythology perpetuates are expressed in the way the society imagines man and the world; it is a morality and a cosmology, even as it is a history. The rite, then, does and can only serve to support the vitality of these beliefs, to prevent them from fading from memory—that is, in short, to revive the most essential elements of the collective consciousness. By this means, the

group periodically reanimates the feeling it has of itself and its unity; at the same time, the nature of individuals as social beings is re-affirmed. The glorious memories that are revived before their eyes, and with which they feel allied, give them a feeling of strength and confidence. One is more certain of one's faith when one sees its relation to the distant past and the great things it has inspired. It is this aspect of the ceremony that makes it instructive. It acts on consciousness, and on this alone. If, however, people believe that it acts on things, that it ensures the prosperity of the species, this can only be a counterpart to the moral influence it exerts, which is obviously the only influence that is real. Thus the hypothesis that we have advanced is verified by a significant experiment, and the verification is all the more conclusive because, as we have just established, there is no qualitative difference between the ritual system of the Warramunga and that of the Arunta. One merely brings out more clearly what we had already conjectured about the other.

II

But there are ceremonies in which this representational aspect is still more pronounced.

In those just discussed, the dramatic representation was not done for its own sake but as a means to an entirely material end—the reproduction of the totemic species. But there are other dramatic representations that do not differ in detail from these and yet involve no preoccupation of this kind. The past is represented for the sole purpose of representing it, of engraving it more deeply in people's minds, without any expectation that the rite will have a specific influence on nature. At any rate, the physical effects sometimes ascribed to it are entirely secondary and unconnected to the liturgical importance it is given.

This is the case with the festivals that the Warramunga celebrate in honour of the snake Wollunqua.

The Wollunqua is a totem of a very particular kind. It is not a species of animal or plant, but a unique being: there is only one Wollunqua. Moreover, this being is purely mythical. The natives imagine it as a kind of colossal snake, so enormous that when it rises up on its tail, its head is lost in the clouds. [. . .] It serves as the collective name and emblem of a whole group of individuals, who see

it as their common ancestor. [. . .] In the times of the Alcheringa,¹ the Wollunqua travelled around every part of the country. It stopped in different places where it sired *spirit-children*, spiritual principles that still provide souls for those living today. [. . .]

Now, the Wollunqua is the object of ceremonies that are not qualitatively different from those we have just studied: they are dramatizations in which the main events of its fabulous life are represented. It is shown coming out of the ground, moving from one place to another; various episodes from its travels are represented, and so on. [. . .] The constituent rites of this long festival are indistinguishable in detail from the ordinary Intichiuma of the Warramunga. [. . .] On the other hand, it is an Intichiuma whose purpose cannot be to ensure the fertility of an animal or plant species, since the Wollunqua is a species unto itself and does not reproduce. It simply is, and the natives do not seem to think it needs a cult to preserve its being.

Not only do these ceremonies lack the efficacy of the classic Intichiuma, they appear to have no material efficacy of any kind. The Wollunqua is not a divinity in charge of a fixed order of natural phenomena, and so no specific service is expected of it in exchange for cultic observance. It is said, of course, that if the ritual prescriptions are poorly observed, the Wollunqua is angry, leaves its retreat, and comes to take revenge on its worshippers for their negligence. Conversely, when everything is done properly, people believe that all is well, and that some happy event will occur. But the idea of possible sanctions evidently came to mind after the fact, to account for the rite. Once the ceremony was instituted, it seemed natural that it should serve some purpose, and consequently that the omission of prescribed observances exposed the community to danger. But it was not instituted to prevent these mythic dangers, or to gain particular advantages.

These advantages, moreover, are imagined only in the vaguest way. The elders, for example, announce, when everything is done, that the Wollunqua, if it is satisfied, will send rain. But the festival is not celebrated to bring rain. It is celebrated because the ancestors celebrated it, because people are attached to it as a venerable tradition, and because they leave it with an impression of moral

¹ Not to complicate the terminology, we are using the Arunta word; among the Warramunga, this mythic period is called Wingara.

well-being. As for other considerations, they play only a complementary role; they can confirm the faithful in the attitude that the rite prescribes, but they are not the rationale for this attitude.

So here we have a collection of ceremonies intended solely to awaken certain ideas and feelings, to link the present to the past, the individual to the collectivity. In fact, not only do these ceremonies serve no other ends, but the faithful themselves ask nothing more of them. This is new proof that the psychic state of the assembled group is indeed the sole solid and stable basis for what we might call the ritual mentality. As for beliefs that attribute this or that physical efficacy to the rites, they are merely accessory and contingent, since such beliefs can be absent without changing anything essential in the rite. Thus the ceremonies of the Wollunqua, even more than those discussed above, reveal in its nakedness—as it were—the fundamental function of the positive cult.

Moreover, if we have particularly emphasized these solemnities, it is because of their exceptional importance. There are others, however, that have exactly the same character. For instance, among the Warramunga, there is a totem of 'the laughing boy'. [. . .] The rites attached to this totem are indistinguishable from those devoted to animal and plant totems. Yet it is obvious that they could have no physical efficacy. They consist of a series of four ceremonies, repeated one after the other, which are meant solely to amuse, to provoke laughter through laughter—in short, to bring cheer and good humour to the group, which specializes in these moral dispositions. [. . .]

While these ritual enactments give us a better understanding of the nature of the cult, they also reveal an important element of religion: its recreational and aesthetic element.

We have already had occasion to show that they are closely akin to dramatic representations. This kinship appears even more clearly in the ceremonies just discussed. Indeed, not only do they use the same methods as drama proper, but they pursue a similar goal. Alien to utilitarian aims, they make men forget the real world in order to transport them into another in which their imagination is more at ease; they entertain. They even have the external trappings of recreation, with the participants laughing and openly enjoying themselves.

Representational rites and collective recreation are, indeed, so

closely related that people shift from one to the other with no sense of discontinuity. [. . .] Perhaps even certain representations that are meant only to entertain today are really former rites whose function has changed. In fact, the boundaries between these two kinds of ceremonies are so fluid that it is impossible to say with any certainty to which category they belong.

It is a well-known fact that games and the major art forms seem to have emerged from religion, and that they long preserved a religious character. We can see why. The cult, while aiming directly at other ends, was at the same time a form of recreation. Religion did not play this role by chance, thanks to some fortunate coincidence, but out of an inherent necessity. Indeed, although religious thought is something quite different from a system of fictions, as we have established, the realities to which it corresponds are expressed religiously only if they are transfigured by imagination. There is a considerable distance between society as it is objectively and the sacred things that represent it symbolically. The impressions men really felt, which served as raw material for this construction, had to be interpreted, elaborated, and transformed until they became unrecognizable. In its outward form, then, the world of religious things is in part an imaginary world, and for this reason it lends itself more readily to the free creations of the mind. Moreover, because the intellectual forces that create it are intense and tumultuous, the singular task of expressing the real with the help of suitable symbols is not enough to occupy those forces. A surplus remains generally available to engage in supplementary, superfluous works of luxury—that is, in works of art.

Practices of this kind exist along with beliefs. The state of effervescence in which the assembled worshippers find themselves is necessarily expressed outwardly by exuberant movements that are not easily subordinated to narrowly defined ends. They escape, in part, to no purpose, performed strictly for the pleasure of performing and delighting in something like games. Furthermore, to the extent that the beings to which the cult is addressed are imaginary, they are unfit to contain and regulate this exuberance. It requires the pressure of tangible and resistant realities to channel this activity into specific and economical adaptations. So we may miscalculate when we try to assign each gesture a precise purpose and a well-defined rationale. There are some that serve no purpose at all;* they

answer simply to the worshippers' feeling that they need to act, to move, to gesticulate. They may leap, turn, dance, shout, and sing, and this agitation may have no discernible meaning.

Thus religion would not be religion if it did not make some place for the free combinations of thought and activity, for play, for art, for all those things that renew the spirit worn down by the constraints of daily labour; the very causes that called religion into existence make it a necessity. Art is not simply an external ornament donned by the cult to conceal its excessively harsh and austere side; rather the cult has an aesthetic aspect in itself. Due to the well-known relationship between mythology and poetry, people sometimes wanted to place mythology outside religion;¹ the truth is that there is poetry inherent in all religion. The representational ceremonies just studied make this aspect of religious life palpable, but there are almost no rites that do not express it to some extent.

To be sure, it would be a grave error to see only that aspect of religion or to exaggerate its importance. When a rite functions only as entertainment, it is no longer a rite. The moral forces that religious symbols express are real forces to be reckoned with, and we cannot simply do as we please with them. Although the purpose of the cult is not to produce physical effects but is deliberately confined to acting on minds, its influence is directed differently from that of a pure work of art. The representations it awakens and sustains in us are not vain images that correspond to nothing in reality, evoked to no purpose but simply for the satisfaction of seeing them appear and combine before our eyes. They are as necessary to the proper functioning of our moral life as food is to sustain our physical life. For it is through them that the group affirms and maintains itself, and we know how indispensable it is to the individual. A rite is therefore something other than a game; it belongs to the serious side of life.

But if the unreal and imaginary element is not essential, it none the less plays a role that is far from trivial. It enters into that feeling of comfort that the worshipper takes away from the completed rite; for recreation is one of the forms of this moral rebuilding that is the chief purpose of the positive cult. Once we are acquitted of our ritual duties, we re-enter profane life with more courage and enthusiasm, not only because we have put ourselves in touch with a higher source

¹ See above, pp. 71-2.

of energy, but also because our forces have been reinvigorated by living briefly a life that is more relaxed, more free and easy. In this way, religion has a charm that is not the least of its attractions.

That is why the very idea of a religious ceremony of some importance naturally awakens the idea of festival. Conversely, every festival, even one purely secular in origin, has certain features of the religious ceremony, for it always has the effect of bringing individuals together, setting the masses in motion, and so inducing that state of effervescence, sometimes even delirium, that is not unrelated to the religious state. Man is transported outside himself, distracted from his ordinary occupations and preoccupations. And we observe the same displays in both cases: cries, songs, music, violent movements, dances, the search for stimulants that increase vitality, and so on. It has often been observed that popular festivals lead to excess, blur the boundaries between licit and illicit. Religious ceremonies also define a need to violate rules that are usually among the most highly respected. This is certainly not because there is no difference between the two forms of public activity. Simple rejoicing, the profane corroboree, has no serious purpose, whereas a ritual ceremony taken as a whole has a serious goal. Yet it must be observed that there is no rejoicing in which the serious side of life has no echo. Basically, the difference lies rather in the unequal proportions in which these two elements are combined.

III

A more general fact confirms the preceding views. In their first work, Spencer and Gillen presented the Intichiuma as a perfectly defined ritual entity: they spoke about it as an operation exclusively meant to ensure the reproduction of the totemic species, and it seemed to lose any kind of meaning outside this single function. But in their *North-ern Tribes of Central Australia*, the same authors, perhaps without realizing it, use a different language. They recognize that the same ceremonies can just as well take place in the Intichiuma proper or in the rites of initiation. Therefore, they serve equally to make animals and plants of the totemic species, or to confer on novices the qualities necessary for them to become regular members of the society of men. From this point of view, the Intichiuma can be seen in a new light. It is no longer a distinct ritual mechanism, based on principles

intrinsic to it, but a particular application of more general ceremonies that can be utilized for very different ends. [. . .]

Hubert and Mauss have already indicated a functional ambiguity of the same kind in the case of sacrifice, especially Hindu sacrifice.¹ They have shown how the sacrifices of communion, expiation, vow, and contract were merely simple variants of one and the same mechanism. We now see that the fact is much more primitive, and that it is in no way limited to the institution of sacrifice. Perhaps no rite exists that does not display a similar indeterminacy. The mass is said for marriages as well as for burials; it redeems the sins of the dead, it ensures the living the favours of the divinity, and so on. Fasting is an expiation and a penance; but it is also a preparation for communion; it even confers positive virtues. This ambiguity demonstrates that the real function of a rite consists, not in the particular and well-defined effects it seems meant to achieve and by which it is usually characterized, but in a general action that, while remaining always and everywhere the same, is yet capable of taking different forms according to the circumstances.

The theory we have proposed assumes precisely this. If the true role of the cult is to awaken a certain state of soul in the faithful that consists of moral force and confidence, and if the disparate effects ascribed to the rites are due only to a secondary and variable determination of this fundamental state, then it is not surprising that the same rite, while preserving the same contents and the same structure, seems to produce multiple effects. For the mental dispositions it serves to bring about remain the same in all cases and depend on the fact that the group is assembled, not on the special reasons for which it assembled. On the other hand, these are interpreted differently according to the circumstances to which they are applied. Do people want to obtain a physical result? The experienced confidence enhances the belief that this result is or will be obtained by the means employed. Has someone committed a sin he wants to efface? The same state of moral assurance will lend the same ritual gestures expiatory powers. Thus, the apparent efficacy will seem to change, while the real efficacy remains invariable, and the rite will seem to fulfil disparate functions, although in fact it has only one, which is always the same.

¹ Hubert and Mauss, 'Essai sur la nature et fonction du sacrifice', 83.

Conversely, just as a single rite can serve several ends, several rites can produce the same effect and are mutually interchangeable. In order to ensure the reproduction of the totemic species, one can turn equally to offerings, practical initiatives, or commemorative representations. This capacity of rites to substitute for one another demonstrates once again, as does their plasticity, the extreme generality of the useful influence they exert. The essential thing is that individuals should be reunited, that common feelings should be re-experienced and expressed by common acts. As to the particular nature of these feelings and acts, that is something relatively secondary and contingent. To become conscious of itself, the group does not need to produce these particular gestures rather than those. It must commune through the same thought and the same action; but the kinds of thought or action in which this communion takes place are of little importance. Of course, these external forms are not determined by chance; they have their reasons; but these reasons are not essential to the cult.

All this leads us back to the same idea: that rites are, above all, the means by which the social group periodically reaffirms itself. And in this way perhaps we can manage to reconstruct hypothetically the way the totemic cult must have first arisen. Some men, who felt united in part by blood ties but even more by a community of interests and traditions, gathered and took stock of their moral unity. For the reasons we have proposed, they were led to imagine this unity in the form of a special kind of consubstantiality: they thought of themselves as participating in the nature of a specific animal. For them, under these conditions, there was only one way of affirming their collective existence, and that was to affirm themselves as animals of this same species, not only in the silence of consciousness but through physical acts. It was these acts that constituted the cult, and clearly they must have consisted of movements imitating the animal with whom man identified. So understood, imitative rites seem to be the first form of the cult. Some will find that this is attributing a rather major historical role to practices that at first glance resemble childish games. But as we have shown, these naive and clumsy gestures, these crude methods of representation, express and support a feeling of pride, confidence, and veneration quite comparable to that expressed by the faithful of the most idealist religions, who proclaim themselves the children of the almighty god. In both cases, this

feeling issues from the same impressions of security and respect aroused in individual consciousness by the great moral force that dominates and sustains them: the collective force.

Very likely, all the other rites we have examined are merely modalities of this essential rite. Once the close solidarity of animal and man was accepted, people felt the urgent necessity of ensuring the regular reproduction of the totemic species, and they made this reproduction the chief object of the cult. Those imitative practices, which had originally, perhaps, only a moral purpose, were thus subordinated to a utilitarian and material end, and were conceived as the means to produce the desired result. But with the development of the mythology that first confused the ancestral hero with the totemic animal, the ancestor became a more distinct and more personal figure; imitation of the ancestor was substituted for imitation of the animal or juxtaposed with it, and representational ceremonies replaced or supplemented mimetic rites. Finally, to be sure of reaching his goal, man felt the need to employ all the means at his disposal. He had at hand reserves of life-energy that had accumulated in the sacred rocks, and so he used these; since man's blood was of the same nature as that of the animal, he used it to the same purpose, and shed it. Conversely, because of this kinship, man used the flesh of the animal to renew his own substance. Hence the rites of oblation and communion. All in all, however, these diverse practices are merely variants of one and the same theme: fundamentally, we encounter everywhere the same state of mind interpreted differently according to the situations, historical moments, and inclinations of the faithful.

CHAPTER 5

PIACULAR RITES AND THE AMBIGUITY OF THE NOTION OF THE SACRED

As different as the gestures they involve may be, the various positive rites we have just reviewed have a common character: they are all performed in a state of confidence, alacrity, and even enthusiasm. Although the expectation of a future and contingent event is not free from uncertainty, it is none the less normal for the rain to fall at the proper season, for the animal and plant species to reproduce themselves regularly. An experience, once repeated, has demonstrated that in principle the rites produce the hoped-for effect, and this is their rationale. People celebrate them with security, enjoying in advance the happy event they promote and announce. The movements executed contribute to this state of mind. Of course they are marked by the seriousness that always attends a religious ritual, but this seriousness excludes neither animation nor joy.

These are joyous festivals. But there are also sad festivals, whose purpose is either to cope with a catastrophe or quite simply to recall and deplore it. These rites take a particular form, which we shall try to characterize and explain. Since they reveal to us a new aspect of religious life, it is even more crucial to examine them separately.

We propose to call ceremonies of this kind 'piacular'.* The term *piaculum*, while suggesting the idea of expiation, has the advantage of a much more extended meaning. Any misfortune, anything that is a bad omen, anything that inspires feelings of anguish or fear necessitates a *piaculum* and is consequently called *piacular*.¹ Therefore, the word seems appropriate to designate rites that are celebrated in worry or sadness.

¹ 'Piacularia auspicia appellabant quae sacrificantibus tristitia portendebant' (Paul ex. Fest., p. 244, ed. Muller). The word *piaculum* is even used as synonymous with misfortune. 'Vetonica herba', says Pliny the Elder, 'tantum gloriae habet ut domus in qua sata sit tuta existimetur a piaculis omnibus' (*Natural History* 25. 8. 46).

I

Mourning offers us a first and important example of piacular rites. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the different rites of mourning. There are some that consist of pure abstentions: it is forbidden to pronounce the name of the dead, to linger in the place where the death took place; relatives, especially those of the female sex, must abstain from all communication with strangers; the ordinary occupations of life are suspended, as they are during festivals, and so on. All these practices belong to the negative cult and are explained as rites of that kind, so they do not concern us here. They arise from the fact that the dead person is a sacred being. Hence, everything that is or was connected to the deceased is, by contagion, in a religious state that excludes all contact with the things of profane life.

But mourning is not made up exclusively of the observance of prohibitions. Positive acts are required for which the relatives are both the agents and the sufferers.

Often, these rites begin the moment when death seems imminent. Here is a scene Spencer and Gillen witnessed among the War-ramunga. A totemic ceremony had just been celebrated, and the troop of actors and spectators were leaving the consecrated ground, when suddenly a piercing cry rose from the camp: a man was dying. Instantly, the entire company began to run as quickly as possible, and most of them, while running, began to cry out. 'Between us and the camp', these observers recount

there was a deep stream on whose banks sat several men; scattered here and there, heads down between their knees, they cried and lamented.

As we crossed the stream, we found the camp broken up, as required by custom. Some of the women, who had come from all directions, lay upon the body of the dying man; others stood or knelt all around it, pushing the points of their digging sticks into the tops of their heads, thereby causing wounds from which the blood ran down over their faces. They kept up a continuous wailing all the while.

At this juncture, some men run up to the body, throwing themselves down upon it as the women get up; after a few moments, nothing is visible but a writhing mass of interlaced bodies. To one side, seated with their backs to the dying man, and still dressed in their ceremonial decorations, three men of the Thapungarti class let out piercing cries. After a minute or two, another man of the same class rushes onto the scene, screaming

with pain and brandishing a stone knife. As soon as he reaches the camp, he makes such deep incisions across his thighs, into the muscles, that, unable to hold himself up, he finally falls on the ground in the midst of a group; two or three of his female relatives pull him away and apply their lips to his gaping wounds while he lies senseless.

The sick man died only later that evening. As soon as he had breathed his last, the same scene began all over again; only this time, the screams were even more piercing. Caught in a kind of frenzy, men and women ran around in an agitated way, wounding themselves with knives and pointed sticks. The women struck each other without trying to fend off the blows. Finally, after an hour, a torch-light procession set off toward the plain, to the tree in whose branches the body was placed.¹

Despite the violence of these demonstrations, they are strictly governed by etiquette. The individuals who inflict the bloody incisions on themselves are designated by custom: they must be related to the dead person in a particular way. Among the Warramunga, in the case observed by Spencer and Gillen, those who slashed their thighs were the maternal grandfather of the deceased, his maternal uncle, and his wife's maternal uncle and brother. Others are required to cut their whiskers and hair, and then to cover their shorn heads with pipe clay. The women have particularly severe obligations. They must cut their hair and cover their whole bodies with pipe clay; what is more, an absolute silence is imposed on them for their entire mourning period, which can last up to two years. Because of this prohibition, it is not rare among the Warramunga for all the women of a camp to be condemned to the most complete silence. They become so accustomed to it that even after the mourning period expires, they voluntarily renounce spoken language, and prefer to use a sign language, which they employ with remarkable facility. Spencer and Gillen knew an old woman who had not spoken for more than twenty-four years.²

The ceremony we have described inaugurates a long series of rites

¹ *Northern Tribes*, 516-17.

² *Ibid.* 525-6. This prohibition on speaking, which is peculiar to women, while it consists of a simple abstention, has all the trademarks of a piacular rite. It is a way of inconveniencing oneself. This is why we mention it here. Fasting can also constitute a piacular rite, depending on the circumstances, or an ascetic rite. It all depends on the conditions in which it takes place and its purpose (on the difference between these two kinds of rites, see below, p. 295).

that unfold, one after the other, over a period of weeks and months. It is repeated on the following days in various forms. Groups of men and women sit on the ground, crying, lamenting, and embracing at specified times. These ritual embraces are frequently repeated during the mourning period. It seems the individuals feel the need to draw near and commune more closely; they can be seen pressed against one another and intertwined to form a single mass emitting loud groans. Meanwhile, the women again begin to lacerate their heads and aggravate their wounds, even using the points of sticks heated in the fire.

These kinds of practices are common throughout Australia. Funeral rites—the ritual care given to the corpse, the way it is buried, etc.—change from tribe to tribe, and in the same tribe they vary with an individual's age, sex, and social status. But the mourning ceremonies proper reproduce the same theme everywhere and vary only in detail. Everywhere there is the same silence punctuated by groans, the same obligation to cut the hair or beard, to cover the head with pipe clay or ashes, indeed even excrement. Everywhere there is the same frenzy for self-inflicted beatings, lacerations, and burnings. [. . .]

According to a narrative by Brough Smyth, this is what happens in the southern tribes of the same state.* Once the body is lowered into the grave,

the widow begins her funeral observances. She shears off the hair above her forehead, and, reaching outright frenzy, takes hold of red-hot sticks and applies them to her chest, arms, legs, and thighs. She seems to enjoy the tortures she inflicts on herself. It would be rash and, besides, useless to try to stop her. When she is so exhausted that she can no longer walk, she goes on trying to kick the ashes of the fire and throw them in all directions. Having fallen on the ground, she takes ashes into her hands and rubs her wounds with them; then she scratches her face (the only part of her body that the sticks passed through the fire have not touched). The blood that flows mingles with the ashes that cover her wounds and, still scraping herself, she laments and cries out.¹

[. . .]

Sadness is not the only feeling expressed in the course of these ceremonies; generally a kind of anger is present as well. The relatives

¹ Robert Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria* (Melbourne: J. Ferres, 1878), i. 104.

need in some way to avenge the death that has occurred. They are seen to assault one another in an attempt to wound. Sometimes the attack is real, sometimes it is faked. There are even cases in which bouts of single combat are regularly organized. Among the Kaitish, the deceased's hair belongs by right to his son-in-law. And he must go, accompanied by a troop of relatives and friends, to challenge one of his tribal brothers, that is, a man who belongs to the same matrimonial class as he, and who as such might also have married the dead man's daughter. The challenge cannot be refused, and the two combatants inflict serious wounds on each other's shoulders and thighs. Once the duel is over, the challenger gives his adversary the hair he had provisionally inherited. This man then goes off, in turn, to challenge and fight another of his tribal brothers to whom the precious relic is transmitted, but always provisionally. In this way it passes from hand to hand and circulates from group to group. Moreover, some of these same feelings enter into the kind of rage each relative experiences as he beats, burns, or slashes himself. Pain that reaches such intensity cannot be without anger.

The resemblance of these practices to the vendetta is quite striking. Both issue from the same principle: death calls for the shedding of blood. The difference is that in one case the victims are relatives, and in the other they are strangers. We need not deal specifically with the vendetta, which belongs rather to the study of juridical institutions; yet it is appropriate to show how it is connected to the rites of mourning, whose end it heralds.

In some societies, mourning concludes with a ceremony whose effervescence reaches or even surpasses that of the inaugural ceremonies. Among the Arunta, this rite of closure is called *Urpmilchima*. Spencer and Gillen have witnessed two of these rites. One was celebrated in honour of a man, the other of a woman. Here is their description of the woman's ceremony.¹

They begin by making ornaments of a very particular kind, called *Chimurilia* by the men and *Aramurilia* by the women. Small animal bones that were previously collected are fixed with a kind of resin to the locks of hair provided by the relatives of the dead woman. They attach these pendants to one of those headbands commonly worn by

¹ *Native Tribes*, 508-10.

the women, adding to it white cockatoo and parrot feathers. Once these preparations are completed, the women gather in their camp. They paint their bodies with different colours, according to their degree of kinship with the deceased. After holding one another in an embrace for ten minutes or so, wailing without let-up, they begin walking toward the tomb. At a certain distance, they meet the dead woman's blood brother, accompanied by several of his tribal brothers. Everyone sits on the ground and lamentations begin once again. A *pitchi*¹ that contains the *Chimurilia* is then presented to the elder brother, who presses it against his stomach; it is said to be a way of easing his pain. They take out one of these *Chimurilia*, and the mother of the dead woman puts it on her head for a few moments; then it is returned to the *pitchi*, which the other men take turns pressing against their chests. Finally, the brother puts the *Chimurilia* on the head of two elder sisters, and everyone continues on their way to the tomb. En route, the mother throws herself repeatedly on the ground, trying to slash her head with a pointed stick. Each time the other women lift her up and seem concerned with trying to stop her from hurting herself. Once they arrive at the tomb, she throws herself on the mound, determined to destroy it with her hands, while the other women literally dance on top of her. The tribal mothers and aunts (the sisters of the dead woman's father) follow her example; they too throw themselves on the ground, beating and tearing at one another, and their bodies finally stream with blood. After a certain time, they are pulled away. The elder sisters then make a hole in the earth of the tomb where they put the *Chimurilia*, now in pieces. Once more, the tribal mothers throw themselves on the ground and slash each other's heads. At this moment, 'the crying and wailing of the women who had remained all around seemed to rouse them to the ultimate degree of excitement. The blood that flowed the length of their bodies, over the pipe clay with which they were covered, gave them the appearance of ghosts. At the end, the old mother remained alone lying on the tomb, completely exhausted and groaning feebly.' Then the others lift her up and remove the pipe clay with which she is covered. This is the end of the ceremony and of the mourning. [. . .]

¹ A small wooden vessel mentioned above, p. 247.

II

These rites belong to a type very different from those we have previously described. This is not to say that there are no important similarities between them that should be noted; but the differences are perhaps more obvious. Instead of joyful dances, songs, dramatic performances that amuse and relax the mind, there is weeping and wailing, in short the most varied displays of anguished sorrow and a kind of mutual pity that dominates the scene. To be sure, in the course of the *Intichiuma* blood is also shed; but these are offerings made in a gesture of pious enthusiasm. If the gestures are similar, the feelings they express are different and even opposite. Likewise, ascetic rites certainly involve privations, abstinences, and mutilations, but these must be borne with a sort of impassive firmness and a kind of serenity. Here, by contrast, despondency, cries, and tears are the rule. The ascetic tortures himself to prove to himself and to his peers that he is above suffering. In mourning, self-inflicted wounds are made to prove that one is suffering. We recognize in these signs the characteristic features of piacular rites.

How should these rites be explained?

One initial fact is constant: mourning is not the spontaneous expression of individual emotions. If the relatives weep, lament, and beat each other and themselves, it is not because they feel personally touched by the death of their kinsman. No doubt it may happen, in particular cases, that the sorrow expressed is sincerely felt. But more generally, there is no connection between the feelings experienced and the gestures performed by the actors of the rite.* If, at the very moment when the mourners seem most overcome by pain, you speak to them about some secular interest of theirs, it often happens that they instantly change their expression and tone, take on a cheerful air, and talk with all the gaiety in the world. Mourning is not a natural impulse of the private sensibility bruised by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group. They lament, not simply because they are sad, but because they are obliged to lament. This is a ritual attitude they are compelled to adopt out of respect for custom, but which is in large measure independent of the affective state of individuals. Moreover, this obligation is sanctioned by mythic or social punishments. For example, they believe that when a relative does not mourn as he should, the soul of the dead person dogs his steps and

kills him. In other cases, the society does not leave it to religious forces to punish the negligent parties; it intervenes to check the ritual lapses. If a son-in-law does not perform the funerary duties owed to his father-in-law, if he does not cut himself in the prescribed way, his tribal fathers-in-law reclaim his wife and give her to someone else. To comply with custom, they sometimes force tears to flow by artificial means.

Where does this obligation come from?

Ethnographers and sociologists have generally been satisfied with the answer that the natives themselves give to this question. They say that the dead person wants to be wept for, that by refusing him his rightful tribute of regrets, they offend him, and that the only way of preventing his anger is to abide by his wishes.

But this mythological explanation merely modifies the terms of the problem without resolving it, since we still need to know why the dead make an imperative claim to mourning. [. . .] It is far from true that the desire to survive in the memory of those who live on should be considered the origin of mourning. Rather, we begin to wonder if it was not mourning itself that, once established, might have awakened the idea and the taste for posthumous regrets.

The classic interpretation seems even more untenable when we know what primitive mourning is. It consists not simply of pious regrets accorded to one who no longer exists, but of harsh abstinence and cruel sacrifice. The rite requires not only that the mourner think of the deceased with melancholy, but that he inflict brutal beatings, lacerations, and burns on himself. We have even seen that people in mourning set about torturing themselves with such abandon that sometimes they do not survive their wounds. What reason would the dead person have to impose these tortures? [. . .]

The mythic explanation expresses the native's idea of the rite, but not the rite itself. We can therefore put it aside in order to discover the reality it expresses but distorts. If mourning differs from other forms of the positive cult, there is one way in which they are similar: it, too, consists of collective ceremonies that bring about a state of effervescence among the participants. The feelings of overexcitement are different, but the overexcitement is the same. It is therefore a safe assumption that the explanation of joyful rites can be applied to sorrowful rites, provided the terms are transposed.

When an individual dies, the family group to which he belongs

feels diminished, and in order to react against this diminishment, it assembles. A common misfortune has the same effects as the arrival of a happy event: it awakens collective feelings that impel individuals to seek each other out and come together. We have even seen this need affirmed with special energy—people kiss, embrace, and press against one another as much as possible. But the emotional state in which the group finds itself reflects the immediate circumstances. Not only do the relatives most directly affected bring their personal pain to the gathering, but society exerts a moral pressure on its members to put their feelings in harmony with the situation. To allow them to remain indifferent to the blow that strikes and diminishes them would be to proclaim that society does not hold its rightful place in their hearts, and this would be to deny itself. A family that tolerates a death among its members without weeping bears witness that it lacks moral unity and cohesion: it abdicates, it renounces its being.

For his part, when the individual is firmly attached to the society to which he belongs, he feels morally compelled to share its joys and sorrows; to remain a disinterested observer would be to break the ties that bind him to the collectivity, to give up wanting the collectivity, and to contradict himself. If the Christian fasts and mortifies himself during the commemorative festivals of the Passion, and the Jew does so on the anniversary of the fall of Jerusalem, it is not to give vent to a spontaneously experienced sadness. In these circumstances, the inner state of the believer is not comparable to the harsh abstinence to which he submits. If he is sad, it is above all because he is constrained to be sad, and he constrains himself to affirm his faith. The Australian's attitude during mourning is explained in the same way. If he weeps and wails, it is not simply to express an individual grief, but to fulfil a duty to the feeling that the surrounding society does not fail to remind him of in the event.

We know from other sources how human feelings are intensified when they are affirmed collectively. Sadness, like joy, is exalted and amplified by its reverberation from consciousness to consciousness, and is then expressed outwardly in the form of exuberant and violent movements. This is no longer the joyful agitation we were observing earlier; these are cries, shouts of pain. Each person is led along by all the others, and the result is something like a panic of sadness. When pain reaches such a degree of intensity, it is mingled with a kind of

anger and exasperation. One feels the need to break and destroy something, and this is taken out on oneself or on others. One beats, wounds, and burns oneself, or one throws oneself on someone else to beat, wound, and burn him instead. So the custom during mourning of indulging in veritable orgies of torture is established. It seems to us very likely that the vendetta and head hunting have the same origin. If every death is attributed to some magic spell, and for that reason people believe that the deceased must be avenged, this is because they feel the need to find a victim on whom to discharge the collective pain and anger at any price. Naturally, this victim is sought outside the group, for a stranger is a subject *minoris resistentiae*.* Since he is not protected by the feelings of sympathy attached to a relative or neighbour, there is nothing in him that repels and neutralizes the bad and destructive feelings that death has aroused. This is no doubt the same reason why the woman, more often than the man, serves as the passive object of the cruellest rites of mourning. Because she has a lower social value, she is more promptly singled out as a scapegoat.

We see that this explanation of mourning entirely leaves out the notion of soul or spirit. The only forces that are really in play are of an utterly impersonal nature: the emotions aroused in the group by the death of one of its members. But the primitive is unaware of the psychic mechanism that generates all these practices. So when he tries to account for them, he is obliged to construct a very different explanation. All he knows is that he is compelled to mortify himself painfully. Since every obligation awakens the idea of a will to oblige, he searches around him for the source of the constraint to which he submits. Now, there is a moral power whose reality seems certain to him, and which seems marked out for this role: that is the soul set free by death. For what party could be more interested in the repercussions of its own death on the living? Therefore, he imagines that if the survivors inflict upon themselves such an unnatural treatment, this is to conform to the soul's demands. Thus the idea of soul must have intervened after the fact in the mythology of mourning. On the other hand, since it is endowed with such inhuman demands, it must indeed be assumed that in leaving the body it animated, it shed all human feeling. This explains the metamorphosis that turns yesterday's relative into a dreaded enemy. This transformation is not the source of mourning, but rather its consequence. It translates the

change that has come about in the affective state of the group: they do not weep for the deceased because they fear him; they fear him because they weep for him.

But this change in emotional state can be only temporary, for the ceremonies of mourning both issue from it and bring it to a close. They gradually neutralize the very causes that engendered them. The origin of mourning is the impression of diminishment that the group feels when it loses one of its members. But this very impression has the effect of bringing individuals together, putting them into closer contact, making them participate in the same state of the soul. And all this releases a sensation of comfort that compensates for the initial diminishment. They weep together because they value one another and because the collectivity, despite this blow, is not damaged. Of course, in this instance they share only sad emotions; but to commune in sadness is still to commune, and every communion of consciousness, of whatever kind, increases the social vitality. And the exceptional violence of the displays by which communal pain is necessarily and compulsorily expressed attests to the fact that at this moment, society is even more vigorous and active than ever. In fact, when social feeling is painfully bruised, it reacts with more force than usual: we never value our family as much as when it has just been tested. This surge of energy effaces all the more completely the disabling effects that originally occur, and the sensation of cold that death always brings in its wake. The group feels its strength gradually return; it begins to hope and to live again. Mourning is left behind, thanks to mourning itself. But since the idea of the soul reflects the moral state of society, this idea must change when that state changes. During the period of dejection and anguish, people imagined the soul in the guise of an evil being, bent on persecuting men. Now that they feel their confidence and safety renewed, they must admit that the soul has recovered its original nature and its original feelings of tenderness and solidarity. This can explain the very different way it is conceived at different moments of its existence.

Not only do mourning rites determine some of the secondary characteristics ascribed to the soul, but the idea that the soul survives the body is probably not alien to them. In order to understand the practices to which he submits upon the death of a relative, man is obliged to believe that these practices must matter to the deceased.

The shedding of blood that is so widely practised during mourning is actually a sacrifice offered to the dead. This is surely because something of the dead person survives; and since it is not the body, which is clearly lifeless and decomposing, it can only be the soul. Of course, it is impossible to say with precision what part these considerations played in the genesis of the idea of survival. But it is probable that the influence of the cult here was the same as it was in other instances. Rites are more easily explained when one imagines that they are addressed to personal beings. Therefore men have been inclined to extend the influence of mythic personalities in religious life. To account for mourning, they have prolonged the existence of the soul beyond the grave. This is a new example of the way that rites influence beliefs.

III

But death is not the only event that might disturb a community. There are many other occasions for sadness and anguish among men, and consequently we can imagine that even the Australians know and practise peculiar rites other than mourning. Yet it is noteworthy that only a small number of examples are found in the accounts of observers.

One rite of this sort closely resembles those just examined. We recall that among the Arunta, each local group attributes exceptionally important powers to its collection of *churingas*: it is a collective palladium, whose fate is thought to be linked to that of the collectivity. And when enemies or whites manage to steal one of these religious treasures, this loss is considered a public calamity. Now this misfortune is the occasion of a rite that has all the features of mourning: people cover their bodies with white pipe clay and remain in camp for two weeks weeping and wailing. This is new proof that mourning is determined not by the way the soul of the dead is imagined but by impersonal causes, by the moral state of the group. [. . .]

Another circumstance that calls for ceremonies of the same kind is the society's distress following an inadequate harvest. [. . .] The sufferings the natives inflict on themselves in order to appease malevolent forces sometimes leave them in such a state of fatigue that they are incapable of going hunting for many days.

These practices are employed especially to combat drought, for

the general scarcity is due to a lack of water. To remedy this ill, they have recourse to violent means. One that is frequently used is the extraction of a tooth. Among the Kaitish, for example, an individual's incisor is pulled and hung on a tree. Among the Dieri, the idea of rain is closely associated with that of bloody incisions, which are made in the skin of the chest and arms. [. . .]

Under the influence of these ideas, mutilations or shedding blood are sometimes considered an effective way of curing illnesses. Among the Dieri, when a child has an accident, his relatives inflict blows on their own heads with either a stick or a boomerang, until the blood flows over their face. They believe that by this means they are alleviating the child's condition.¹ [. . .] The main thing is always to deflect an evil or expiate a misdeed by extraordinary ritual acts.

[. . .] If the only piacular rites that have been discovered, apart from mourning, are so few in number, this is most likely because they are not central to the cult. The fact that rites expressing painful emotions are relatively rare suggests that primitive religions are hardly the offspring of anguish and fear. This is probably because, although the Australian leads a wretched existence compared to that of more civilized peoples, he makes so few demands of life that he is content with very little. He requires only that nature follow its normal course, that the seasons follow one another in a regular fashion, that the rain fall at the right time, in abundance but not excessively. And great disturbances in the cosmic order are always exceptional. It was noteworthy that most of the regular piacular rites reported above were observed in the tribes of central Australia, where droughts are frequent and constitute real disasters. Granted, it is still surprising that piacular rites especially meant to expiate sin seem almost entirely absent. Yet the Australian, like every man, commits ritual sins that he would like to redeem; so we wonder if the silence of texts on this point is not due to the inadequacy of observation.

Yet, although the number of facts we have been able to collect are few, they are none the less instructive.

¹ S. Gason, 'The Dieyerie Tribe', in Edward Micklethwaite Curr, *The Australian Race: Its Origin, Languages, Customs, Place of Landing in Australia, and the Routes by Which it Spread Itself over That Continent* (Melbourne: J. Ferres, 1886-7), ii. 69. The same method is employed to expiate ridicule. When, through clumsiness or otherwise, a person has provoked the laughter of onlookers, he asks one of them to hit him on the head until the blood flows. At this moment, things are set to rights and the person who was mocked participates himself in the amusement of those around him (*ibid.* 70).

When we study piacular rites in the more advanced religions, in which religious forces are individualized, they seem to be closely allied to anthropomorphic conceptions. If the worshipper imposes privations on himself and subjects himself to maltreatment, this is to disarm the malevolence he ascribes to some of the sacred beings on which he believes he depends. In order to appease their hatred or their anger, he anticipates their demands; he beats himself so as not to be beaten by them. Therefore it seems that these practices could emerge only when gods and spirits were conceived as moral personalities capable of passions analogous to those of human beings. For this reason, Robertson Smith thought he could trace expiatory sacrifices and sacrificial offerings to a relatively recent date. According to him, the shedding of blood that characterizes these rites was at first simply a communion process: man spilled his blood on the altar in order to strengthen the ties that bind him to his god. The rite would have taken on a piacular and penal character only when its first meaning was forgotten and the new idea of sacred beings allowed people to ascribe another function to it.¹

But since piacular rites are encountered in Australian societies, it is impossible to assign them such a late origin. Moreover, all those we have just observed, except one, are independent of any anthropomorphic conception: there are no gods or spirits. Abstinence and the shedding of blood stop scarcity and cure illnesses on their own, directly. No spiritual being mediates between the rite and the effects it is thought to produce. Mythic personalities therefore intervened only later. Once the ritual mechanism was established, they functioned to make it easier to imagine, but they are not necessary to its existence. The rite was instituted for other reasons and owes its efficacy to another cause.

It acts through the collective forces it sets in motion. Does a misfortune seem about to threaten the collectivity? People come together, as they do during mourning, and of course a feeling of worry and anguish prevails in the assembled group. The sharing of these feelings has, as always, the effect of intensifying them. In being affirmed, the feelings are exalted, inflamed, and reach a degree of violence that is translated by the corresponding violence of the gestures that express them. As with the death of a close relative, people

¹ Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, lecture XI.

shriek and become carried away, feeling the need to tear and destroy; it is to satisfy this need that they beat and wound themselves, making blood flow. When emotions are so vivid, they may well be painful but they are not depressing. On the contrary, they indicate a state of effervescence that suggests a mobilization of all our active forces and even an influx of external energies. It matters little that this exaltation was provoked by a sad event, it is no less real and does not differ in detail from the exaltation observed in joyous festivals. Sometimes it even manifests itself through the same sorts of movements.¹ [. . .]

Just by being collective, these ceremonies raise the vital tone of the group. Now, when people feel the life within them—whether in the form of painful irritation or joyous enthusiasm—they do not think of death; thus they are reassured, they take heart, and subjectively it is as though the rite really had repelled the dreaded danger. This is how people attribute curative or preventive virtues to the movements that constitute the rite—the shrieks, the shedding of blood, the wounds inflicted on oneself or on others. And since these various torments necessarily involve suffering, suffering in itself comes to be considered a means of banishing evil or curing illness.² Later, when most religious forces took the form of moral personalities, people explained the efficacy of these practices by imagining that they functioned to appease a malevolent or irritated god. But these conceptions merely reflect the rite and the feelings it arouses; they are one interpretation of it, and not the determining cause.

A ritual lapse works no differently. It, too, is a threat to the collectivity; it touches on its moral existence, since it touches on its beliefs. But when the anger it provokes is affirmed outwardly and energetically, it compensates for the harm done. For if it is vividly felt by everyone, this is because the infraction committed is an exception, and because the common faith remains intact. The moral unity of the group is therefore not endangered. Now, the punishment inflicted as expiation is merely the manifestation of this public anger, the material proof of its unanimity. Therefore, it really does have the ameliorating effect attributed to it. Basically, the feeling that is at the

¹ Ibid. 262.

² Moreover, it is possible that belief in the morally tonic virtues of suffering (see p. 232 above) may have played some role. Since pain sanctifies, since it raises the worshipper's religious level, it can also raise it when it has fallen below normal.

root of properly expiatory rites does not differ in kind from that which we have found at the basis of other piacular rites: it is a kind of exacerbated pain that tends to be expressed by acts of destruction. Sometimes, this pain is eased to the detriment of the person who feels it; sometimes it is at the expense of an outside third party. But in both cases, the psychic mechanism is essentially the same.¹

IV

One of the greatest services that Robertson Smith rendered to the science of religion is to have shed light on the ambiguity of the notion of the sacred.

Religious forces are of two kinds. Some are benevolent, guardians of the physical and moral order, dispensers of life, health, all the qualities that men value. This applies to the totemic principle that permeates every species, to the mythic ancestor, to the animal protector, to the civilizing heroes, and to tutelary gods of every kind and degree. Whether they are imagined as distinct personalities or as diffuse energies is of little importance; in both forms they play the same role and affect the consciousness of the faithful in the same way: the respect they inspire is a mixture of love and gratitude. [. . .]

On the other hand, there are negative and impure powers that produce disorder, cause death and illnesses, and instigate sacrilege. Man's only feeling for them is fear usually tinged with horror. Such are the forces on which and through which the magician acts, the forces that come from corpses and menstrual blood, that unleash every profanation of sacred things, and so on. The spirits of the dead and evil geniuses of all kinds are its personified forms.

The contrast between these two categories of forces and beings is as complete as possible, even radically antagonistic. The good and salutary powers strongly repel the others, which deny and contradict them. And the first are forbidden to the second: any contact between them is considered the worst of profanations. This is the type par excellence of those prohibitions between different kinds of sacred things that we have mentioned in passing.² During menstruation,

¹ Cf. what we have said about expiation in our *De la division du travail social* (3rd edn., Paris: Alcan, 1902), 64 ff.

² See above, pp. 223-4.

and especially at the first onset of menses, women are impure; and at this time they are strictly sequestered; the men must have nothing to do with them. The bull-roarers, the *churingas*, are never in contact with the dead. The sacrilegious person is excluded from the society of the faithful and forbidden access to the cult. Thus all religious life gravitates around two opposite poles, which share the opposition between pure and impure, holy and sacrilegious, divine and diabolical.

But even as these two aspects of religious life oppose each other, they are closely related. First of all, they both sustain the same relationship with profane beings, who must abstain from any relationship with holy things. The impure are no less forbidden than the pure, and they, too, are taken out of circulation, meaning that they are also sacred. To be sure, the two do not evoke the same feelings. Disgust and horror are one thing and respect another. None the less, for actions to be the same in both cases, the feelings expressed must not be different in kind. In fact, there is a certain horror in religious respect, particularly when it is very intense; and the fear inspired by malignant powers is not without a certain reverential quality. Indeed, the nuances of difference between these two attitudes are sometimes so elusive that it is not always easy to determine the state of mind of the faithful. Among certain Semitic peoples, pork was forbidden, but it was not always certain if it was forbidden as an impure thing or as something holy.¹ And the same point can be made about a large number of dietary restrictions.

What is more, an impure thing or an evil power often becomes a holy thing or a tutelary power—and vice versa—without changing in nature, but simply through a change in external circumstances. We have seen that the soul of the dead person, at first a dreaded principle, is transformed into a protective genius when the mourning is over. Similarly, the corpse, which at first inspires only terror and distance, is treated later as a venerated relic. [. . .] The totemic animal is the holy being par excellence; but it is a death principle for anyone who improperly consumes its flesh. In a general way, sacrilege is simply something profane that has been affected through contagion by a benevolent religious force. Changing its nature by

¹ Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 153; cf. 446, the additional note titled 'Holiness, Uncleanliness and Taboo'.

changing its habitat, this force pollutes rather than sanctifies. The blood that comes from the woman's genital organs, although obviously as impure as menstrual blood, is often used as a remedy against illness.¹ The victim immolated in expiatory sacrifices is laden with impurity, since it has been heaped with sins that must be redeemed. Yet once it has been slaughtered, its flesh and blood are put to the most pious uses.² By contrast, while communion is a religious operation that normally functions to consecrate, it sometimes produces the same effects as sacrilege. Individuals who have participated in such communion are, in some cases, forced to flee like outcasts. It is as if they have become a source of dangerous contamination for one another: the sacred bond that unites them separates them at the same time. [. . .]

Therefore, the pure and the impure are not two separate genera but two varieties of the same genus that includes all sacred things. There are two kinds of sacred, one auspicious, the other inauspicious. And not only is there no discontinuity between the two forms, but the same object can pass from one to the other without changing its nature. The pure can be made impure, and vice versa. The possibility of these transmutations accounts for the ambiguity of the sacred.

But while Robertson Smith had a strong sense of this ambiguity, he never explained it explicitly. He confines himself to observing that since all religious forces are without distinction intense and contagious, it is wise to approach them only with respectful precautions, no matter how their influence is manifest. It seemed to him that he could thus account for the sense that they are related, despite the contrasts that make them otherwise opposed to one another. But first of all, this only shifted the question; it remained to be seen how evil powers come to have the intensity and contagion of benevolent ones. In other words, how is it that they, too, are inherently religious? Further, their shared energy and power of expansion do not help us understand how, in spite of the conflict that divides them, they can transform into one another or substitute for one another in their

¹ Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*, 464; *Northern Tribes*, 599.

² For example, among the Hebrews, the blood of the expiatory victim is smeared on the altar (Leviticus 4: 5 ff.). The flesh is burned and the ashes are used to make a purifying water (Numbers 19).

respective functions—how the pure can contaminate just as the impure sometimes serve to sanctify.¹

The explanation of piacular rites that we previously proposed allows us to answer this double question.

We have seen, indeed, that negative powers are a product of these rites and symbolize them. When society encounters circumstances that sadden, anguish, or irritate it, it exerts pressure on its members to bear witness to their sadness, their anguish, or their anger through expressive acts. It imposes on them something like a duty to weep, wail, and inflict wounds on themselves or others, for these collective demonstrations and the moral communion they express restore to the group the energy that events were threatening to take away, and this enables the group to recover itself. This is the experience man is interpreting when he imagines malevolent beings outside himself whose hostility, inherent or provisional, can be disarmed only by human suffering. These beings are none other than collective states objectified; they are society itself seen in one of its aspects. On the other hand, we know that benevolent powers are constituted in the same way. They, too, issue from and express collective life; they, too, represent society, but captured in a very different attitude—at the moment when it confidently affirms itself and ardently urges things to contribute to realizing its ends. Since these two kinds of forces have a common origin, it is not surprising that while aiming in opposite directions, they share the same nature: they are equally intense and contagious, and consequently forbidden and sacred.

This allows us to understand how they can transform into one another. Since they reflect the affective state in which the group

¹ It is true that Robertson Smith does not accept the reality of these substitutions and these transformations. According to him, if the expiatory victim served to purify, this is because in itself it contained nothing impure. Originally, it was a holy thing; it was meant to re-establish, by means of a communion, the bonds of kinship that united the worshipper to his god when a ritual lapse had relaxed or broken those bonds. They even chose for this operation an exceptionally holy animal so that the communion should be more efficacious and more completely efface the effects of the transgression. It is only when they ceased to understand the meaning of the rite that the sacrosanct animal was considered impure (*Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 347 ff.). But it is inadmissible that beliefs and practices as universal as those we find at the basis of expiatory sacrifice are the product of a simple error of interpretation. In fact, there is no doubt that the expiatory victim is laden with the impurity of sin. Furthermore, we have just seen that these transformations of pure into impure, or vice versa, are encountered in the simplest societies we know.

finds itself, this state has merely to change for them to change direction. Once mourning is over, the domestic group is calmed by the mourning itself. It regains its confidence, individuals are relieved of the painful pressure exerted upon them, and they feel more at ease. It seems to them, therefore, that the spirit of the deceased has laid aside its hostile feelings and become a benevolent protector. The other transmutations we have cited as examples can be explained in the same way. What makes a thing holy is, as we have shown, the collective feeling attached to it. Let it come into contact with a profane person, in violation of the prohibitions that isolate it, and this same feeling will spread contagiously to that person and mark him with a special character. When this happens, however, that character is very different from his original one. Offended, irritated by the profanation this abusive and unnatural extension implies, he has become aggressive and inclined to destructive violence; he is inclined to take revenge for the suffered offence. For this reason, the subject of contagion seems invaded by a virulent and noxious force that threatens anyone who comes near. Subsequently, he inspires only distancing and repugnance, as if marked by a taint or stain. And yet this stain is caused by the same psychic state that in other circumstances consecrated and sanctified. Now, let the anger thus provoked be satisfied by an expiatory rite and assuaged, and it subsides; the offended feeling is appeased and returns to its initial state. It acts once again as it did at first: instead of contaminating, it sanctifies. Since it continues to infect the object to which it is attached, that object cannot become again profane and religiously neutral. But the direction of the religious force that seems to occupy it is transformed: from being impure it has become pure and an instrument of purification.

In sum, the two poles of religious life correspond to the two opposite states through which all social life passes. There is the same contrast between the auspicious sacred and the inauspicious sacred as between states of collective euphoria and dysphoria. But because both are equally collective, there is an intimate inherent kinship among the mythological constructions that symbolize them. The feelings made common vary from extreme dejection to extreme joy, from painful irritation to ecstatic enthusiasm; but in all cases there is a communion of consciousness and mutual comfort in this communion. The basic process is always the same, only circumstances

give it a different colouring. Finally, it is the unity and the diversity of social life that creates both the unity and the diversity of sacred beings and things.

This ambiguity, moreover, is not peculiar to the notion of the sacred. We find something of the same character in all the rites just studied. Certainly it was essential to distinguish between them. Mingling them indiscriminately would have been to misunderstand the multiple aspects of religious life. But on the other hand, as different as they can be, there is no discontinuity between them. Quite the contrary, they overlap and can even replace one another. We have already shown that rites of oblation and communion, mimetic rites, and commemorative rites often fulfil the same functions. We might have thought that at least the negative cult is more clearly separate from the positive cult. And yet we have seen that it can have positive effects identical to those produced by the positive cult. The same results are obtained with fasting, abstinence, and self-mutilation as with communions, oblations, and commemorations. Conversely, offerings and sacrifices imply privations and renunciations of all sorts. The continuity between ascetic rites and piacular rites is still more apparent: both consist of sufferings, accepted or endured, to which an analogous efficacy is attributed. Like the beliefs, then, the practices do not fall into separate genera. However complex the external manifestations of religious life, it is essentially unitary and simple. Everywhere it answers to the same need and derives from the same state of mind. In all its forms its purpose is to raise man above himself and make him live a life superior to the one he would lead if he were only to obey his individual impulses. Beliefs express this life in terms of representations; rites organize it and regulate its functioning.

CONCLUSION

WE said at the beginning of this work that the religion we were about to study contained within it the most characteristic elements of religious life. The accuracy of this proposition can now be confirmed. As simple as it is, the system we have studied contains all the great ideas and all the major forms of ritual conduct that are at the basis of even the most advanced religions: the distinction between sacred and profane things, the notions of soul, of spirit, of mythic personalities, of a national and even international divinity, the negative cult and its extreme form of ascetic practices, rites of oblation and communion, imitative rites, commemorative rites, piacular rites—nothing essential is missing. Therefore we have reason to hope that our results are not peculiar to totemism alone but can help us understand the nature of religion in general.

Some will object that a single religion, whatever its geographic reach, constitutes a narrow basis for such an inference. We would not dream of dismissing the advantage of extended testing of a theory's authority. But it is equally true that when a law has been proved by a well-designed experiment, this proof is universally valid. If a scientist managed to unearth the secret of life in even a single case, even if this were the case of the simplest conceivable protoplasmic being, the truths obtained would apply to all living things, even the most advanced. So if, in the very humble societies just studied, we have really managed to perceive several of the elements that make up the most fundamental religious notions, there is no reason not to extend the most general results of our research to other religions. Indeed, it is inconceivable that the same effect should have been sometimes due to one cause, sometimes to another, depending on the circumstances, unless the two causes were basically one. The same idea cannot express one reality here and a different reality there, unless this duality is merely apparent. If, among certain peoples, the ideas of sacredness, of soul, of gods is explained sociologically, we must assume scientifically that in principle the same explanation is valid for all peoples among whom the same ideas are found with the same essential features. Assuming we are not mistaken, at least some of our conclusions can legitimately be

generalized. The time has come to state these clearly. And an inference of this kind, having as its basis a well-defined experiment, is less audacious than so many summary generalizations that—in trying to grasp the essence of religion in one stroke, without relying on the analysis of any religion in particular—run the grave risk of getting lost in the void.

I

Most often, the theorists who have endeavoured to express religion in rational terms have seen it, above all, as a system of ideas that correspond to a definite object. This object has been conceived in different ways: nature, the infinite, the unknowable, the ideal, and so on. But these differences are unimportant. In all cases, it was ideas and beliefs that were considered the essential element of religion. As for rites, they seem from this point of view to be merely an external, contingent, and material expression of these inner states that were singled out as having intrinsic value. This conception is so widespread that, for the most part, debates about religion revolve around the question of knowing whether it can be reconciled with science or not, that is, if there is a place next to scientific knowledge for another form of thought that would be specifically religious.

But believers, men who live the religious life and sense its substance directly, object that this way of seeing does not correspond to their daily experience. They feel, in fact, that the true function of religion is not to make us think, to enrich our knowledge, to add thoughts from another source and of another kind to the thoughts we owe to science, but to make us act, to help us live. The worshipper who has communed with his god is not only a man who sees new truths that the unbeliever does not know; he is a man who is *capable* of more. He feels more strength in himself, either to cope with the difficulties of existence or to defeat them. He is raised above human miseries because he is raised above his condition as man; he believes he is saved from evil, in whatever form he conceives of evil.

The first article of all faith is the belief in salvation by faith. Now, we do not see how a single idea could have this efficacy. An idea, in fact, is merely an element of ourselves; how could it confer on us

powers superior to those we have by nature? As rich as it may be in affective virtues, it could not add to our natural vitality; for it can merely unleash the emotive forces that are in us, not create them or increase them. We may imagine an object as worthy of being loved and desired, but it does not follow that we feel stronger for that. This object must release energies superior to those we have at our disposal, and, in addition, we must have some way of making them enter us and mingle with our inner life. Now, for this to happen, thinking about them is not enough, but it is indispensable that we place ourselves in their sphere of action, that we turn in the direction where we can best feel their influence. In a word, we must act and repeat the necessary acts every time it is useful to renew their effects. We glimpse how, from this point of view, the set of regularly repeated acts that constitute the cult takes on its central importance. In fact, anyone who has really practised a religion knows very well that it is the cult that evokes these impressions of joy, of inner peace, of serenity, of enthusiasm, which the faithful hold as the experimental proof of their beliefs. The cult is not simply a system of signs by which faith is expressed outwardly, it is a collection of means by which it is created and periodically recreates itself. Whether it consists of physical manœuvres or mental operations, it is always the cult that is efficacious.

Our entire study rests on this postulate: that this unanimous feeling of believers across time cannot be purely illusory. Echoing a recent apologist for faith,¹ we allow that religious beliefs rest on a specific experience whose demonstrative value is, in a sense, not inferior to that of scientific experiments, while being quite different. We, too, think 'that a tree is known by its fruits',² and that its fecundity is the best proof of its roots' worth. But given the fact that, if you will, 'religious experience' is grounded in some way—and what experience is not?—it does not in the least follow that the reality that grounds it must objectively conform to the idea that believers have of it.* The very fact that the way it has been conceived has varied infinitely at different times suffices to prove that none of these conceptions adequately expresses it. If the scientist poses as an axiom that man's sensations of warmth and light correspond to some objective

¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans, 1902).

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

cause, he does not conclude from this that this cause is accessible to the senses. Similarly, if the impressions the faithful feel are not imaginary, none the less, they do not constitute privileged intuitions; there is no reason to think that they inform us better about the nature of their object than vulgar sensations inform us of the nature of bodies and their properties. To discover what this object is, we must subject these impressions to an elaboration analogous to the one that substituted a scientific and conceptual notion for the sensory notion of the world.

Now, this is precisely what we have tried to do, and we have seen that this reality—which mythologies have represented in so many different forms but which is the objective, universal, and eternal cause of those *sui generis* sensations that make up the religious experience—is society. We have shown what moral forces it develops, and how it awakens that feeling of support, of security, of tutelary dependence that attaches the worshipper to his cult. It is society that raises him above himself. Indeed, it is society that makes him. For man is made by the whole array of intellectual goods that constitutes civilization, and civilization is the work of society. This explains the preponderant role of the cult in all religions, whatever they are. Society can make its influence felt only if it is in action, and it is in action only if the individuals who compose it are assembled and act in common. It is through common action that it becomes conscious of itself and affirms itself; it is above all an active cooperation. Even collective ideas and sensations are possible only thanks to the external movements that symbolize them, as we have established.¹ Therefore, action dominates religious life for the very reason that society is its source.

To all the reasons that have been given to justify this conception, a last one can be added that emerges from this work. We have established along the way that the fundamental categories of thought, and consequently of science, have religious origins. We have seen that this is true of magic as well, and of the various techniques derived from it. On the other hand, it has long been known that until a relatively advanced period in evolution, the rules of morality and law were indistinguishable from ritual prescriptions. In short, it can be

¹ See above, pp. 175 ff.

said that nearly all great social institutions are born of religion.¹ Now, in order for the chief aspects of collective life to have begun as merely diverse aspects of religious life, religious life clearly must have been the pre-eminent form and abbreviated expression of the whole of collective life. If religion generated everything that is essential in society, this is because the idea of society is the soul of religion.

Religious forces, then, are human forces, moral forces. Of course, because collective feelings can become conscious of themselves only by fixing onto external objects, those forces could not be constituted without taking some of their features from things. Thus they have acquired a kind of physical nature; as such they came to be mingled with the life of the material world, and it is through them that people thought they could explain what happens in that world. But when one considers them only from this angle and in this role, one sees only their most superficial side. In reality, their essential elements are borrowed from consciousness. It seems normal for them to have a human character only when they are conceptualized in human form;² but even the most impersonal and most anonymous forces are none other than objectified feelings.

Only by viewing religions from this perspective is it possible to perceive their real significance. On the level of appearances, rites often have the effect of purely manual operations: there are anointings, cleansings, meals. A thing is consecrated when it is put into contact with a source of religious energy, just as today a body is put into contact with a source of heat or electricity in order to warm or electrify it. In either case, the methods employed are not essentially different. Understood in this way, religious technique seems to be a kind of mystic mechanism. But these material manoeuvres are merely the external envelope concealing mental operations. Finally, the point is not to exercise a kind of physical constraint on blind and even imaginary forces but to touch minds, reinvigorate them, and

¹ Only one form of social activity has not yet been explicitly linked to religion: namely, economic activity. However, techniques derived from magic are found, by that very fact, to have indirectly religious origins. Moreover, economic value is a kind of power, of efficacy, and we know the religious origins of the idea of power. Wealth can confer *mana*; this is how it comes to have it. In this way, we see that the idea of economic value and that of religious value cannot be unrelated. But the nature of these relationships has not yet been studied.

² For this reason Frazer and even Preuss put impersonal religious forces outside or, at most, on the threshold of religion, in order to link them to magic.

discipline them. It has sometimes been said that lower religions were materialist. This expression is imprecise. All religions, even the crudest, are in a sense spiritualist: for the powers they put into play are above all spiritual and, moreover, it is their chief function to act on the moral life. We understand, then, that what has been done in the name of religion would not have been done in vain; for it is necessarily the society of men, or humanity, that has reaped its fruits.

Some may ask, what society is it, precisely, that in this way becomes the substrate of religious life? Is it the real society as it exists and functions before our eyes, with the moral and juridical organization it has laboriously fashioned over the course of history? But this society is full of impurities and imperfections. In it, evil jostles good, injustice often prevails, truth is constantly obscured by falsehood. How could an entity so crudely constituted inspire the sentiments of love, ardent enthusiasm, the spirit of sacrifice that all religions require of their faithful? Those perfect beings, the gods, cannot have borrowed their features from a reality so mediocre, sometimes so base.

Or are we speaking of the perfect society, where justice and truth are sovereign, where evil in all its forms is abolished? Unquestionably, such a society would be in close rapport with religious feeling, for all religions are conducive to its realization. Only, this society is not an empirical fact, fixed and observable; it is an illusion, a dream men have used to soothe their miseries but which they have never lived in reality. It is a simple idea that consciously expresses our more or less obscure aspirations toward the good, the beautiful, the ideal. Now, these aspirations have their roots in us; they come from the very depths of our being; so there is nothing outside of us that might account for them. Besides, they are already religious in themselves; the ideal society, then, presupposes religion rather than explains it.¹

First of all, it is an arbitrary simplification to see only the idealistic side of religion—in its way, it is realistic. There is no physical or moral ugliness, no vice, no evil that has not been deified. There were gods of thievery and trickery, lechery and war, illness and death. Christianity itself, even with its elevated idea of the divinity, was obliged to give the evil spirit a place in its mythology. Satan is an

¹ Émile Boutroux, *Science et religion dans la philosophie contemporaine* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1907), 206–7.

essential part of the Christian system; and if he is an impure being, he is not a profane one. The anti-god is a god, lower and subordinate, true, yet endowed with extensive powers; he is even the object of rites, at the very least negative ones. Far from ignoring real society and turning it into an abstraction, religion is the very image of it. It reflects all its aspects, even the most ordinary and repulsive. Everything is found in religion, and if it often represents the triumph of good over evil, life over death, the powers of light over the powers of darkness, this is because reality is no different. If the relation between these opposite forces were reversed, life would be impossible; whereas in fact it sustains itself and even tends to evolve.

But while reality can be clearly glimpsed through mythologies and theologies, it is quite true that it appears there enlarged, transformed, idealized. In this respect, the most primitive religions do not differ from those more recent and more refined. We have seen, for example, how the Arunta place at the origin of time a mythic society whose organization exactly reproduces that which still exists today; it includes the same clans and the same phratries, it is subject to the same matrimonial rules, it practises the same rites. But the personalities that compose it are ideal beings, endowed with powers and virtues to which no common mortal can aspire. Their nature is not only higher, it is different, belonging to animality and humanity at the same time. Evil powers in this society submit to a similar metamorphosis: evil itself is sublimated and idealized. The question that arises is where this idealization comes from.

One answer is that man has a natural faculty for idealizing, that is, for substituting for the world of reality a different world to which he is transported by thought. But this is changing the terms of the problem; it neither resolves nor even advances it. This systematic idealization is an essential feature of religions. To explain them by an innate power to idealize is therefore simply to replace one world with another that is equivalent to the first, as if one were saying that man created religion because he had a religious nature. Yet, the animal knows only one world: the world he perceives through experience, which is as much internal as external. Man alone has the capacity to conceive the ideal and add to the real. Where does this singular privilege come from? Before turning it into a primary fact, a mysterious virtue that eludes science, we must still make sure that this privilege does not depend on conditions that can be empirically determined.

Our proposed explanation of religion has precisely the advantage of offering an answer to this question. For what defines the sacred is that it is superimposed on the real; and the ideal answers to the same definition: we cannot explain one without explaining the other. Indeed, we have seen that when collective life reaches a certain degree of intensity it awakens religious thought, because it determines a state of effervescence that changes the conditions of psychic activity. Vital energies become overstimulated, passions more powerful, sensations stronger; there are even some that are produced only at this moment. Man does not recognize himself; he feels he is transformed, and so he transforms his surroundings. To account for the very specific impressions he feels, he endows the things with which he is most directly in contact with properties that they do not have, exceptional powers, virtues that the objects of ordinary experience do not possess. In a word, on the real world in which his profane life unfolds he superimposes another one that, in a sense, exists only in his thought, but to which he ascribes a kind of higher dignity in relation to the first. It is an ideal world, then, in this double sense.

Thus the formation of an ideal does not constitute an irreducible fact that eludes science; it depends on conditions that observation can grasp; it is a natural product of social life.* For society to become conscious of itself and sustain its feeling of itself with the necessary degree of intensity, it must gather individuals together in sufficient concentration. Now, this concentration determines an exaltation of moral life that is expressed by a set of ideal conceptions in which the new life thus awakened is portrayed. These conceptions correspond to that influx of psychic forces which are then superimposed onto those at our disposal for the ordinary tasks of existence. A society can neither create itself nor recreate itself without at the same time creating the ideal. This creation is not a kind of optional step, a finishing touch that society adds once it has been formed; it is the act by which it fashions and refashions itself periodically. And when we oppose the ideal society to the real society, like two antagonists that would lead us in opposite directions, we are invoking and opposing abstractions. The ideal society is not outside the real society; it is part of it. Far from being torn between them, as between two mutually repellent poles, we cannot insist on one without insisting on the other. For a society is not simply constituted by the mass of

individuals who compose it, by the land they occupy, by the things they use, by the movements they make, but above all by the idea that it fashions of itself. And of course it may hesitate over its conception of itself: it feels pulled in divergent directions. But these conflicts, when they erupt, take place not between the ideal and reality but between different ideals, between the ideal of yesterday and the ideal of today, between one that has the authority of tradition and one that is still evolving. There is certainly a place for investigating how ideals have evolved; but whatever the solution to this problem, it all unfolds none the less in the ideal world.

The collective ideal that religion expresses, then, is not due to some innate power of the individual, but rather to the school of collective life that the individual has learned to idealize. It is by assimilating the ideals elaborated by society that he has become capable of conceiving of the ideal. It is society that, by bringing him into its sphere of influence, has infected him with the need to raise himself above the world of experience and has, at the same time, provided him with the means of conceiving of another. Society has constructed this new world by constructing itself, because it is society that this new world expresses. So, in the individual as in the group, the capacity to idealize has nothing mysterious about it. It is not a kind of luxury that man might do without but a condition of his existence. He would not be a social being, that is, he would not be a man, if he had not acquired it. Of course, by embodying themselves in individuals, the collective ideals tend to become individualized. Each person understands them in his own way, marks them with his imprint; they are divided into their constituent elements, others are added to them. The personal ideal thus departs from the social ideal to the extent that the individual personality is developed and becomes an autonomous source of action. But if we want to understand this evidently singular aptitude for living outside the real, it is enough to reconnect it with the social conditions on which it depends.

One must be on guard, then, against seeing this theory of religion as a simple revival of historical materialism, since this would be a singular misapprehension of our thought. By showing something essentially social in religion, we do not in the least mean that it is confined to expressing the material forms of society and its immediately vital necessities in another language. Of course, we take it as

obvious that social life depends on and bears the mark of its material substrate, just as the mental life of the individual depends on the brain and indeed on the whole body. But collective consciousness is something different from a simple epiphenomenon of its morphological base, just as individual consciousness is something different from a simple efflorescence of the nervous system. For the first to appear, it must be produced by a *sui generis* synthesis of particular consciousnesses. Now, this synthesis has the effect of unlocking a whole world of feelings, ideas, and images that, once born, obey their own laws. They are mutually attractive and repellent, they fuse, segment, and proliferate without being directly ordered and required to do so by the state of underlying reality. The life thus conjured up even enjoys such great independence that it sometimes plays out in aimless, useless manifestations for the sole pleasure of affirming itself. Indeed, we have shown that this is often the case with ritual activity and mythological thought.¹

But if religion is a product of social causes, how do we explain the individual cult and the universalist character of certain religions? If it is born *in foro externo*,* how could it pass into the individual's innermost self and become ever more deeply embedded there? If it is the work of specific, individualized societies, how could it be separate from those societies and conceived as something common to humanity as a whole?

We have encountered in the course of our enquiry the first seeds of individual religion and religious cosmopolitanism, and we have seen how they were formed; so we do have the most general elements of the answer to this dual question.

We have shown, indeed, how the religious force that animates the clan, by becoming embodied in particular consciousnesses is particularized itself. In this way, secondary sacred beings are formed; each individual has his own, made in his image, associated with his inner life, allied to his fate: these are the soul, the individual totem, the protective ancestor, and so on. These beings are objects of rites that the worshipper can celebrate alone, outside any group, hence the primary form of the individual cult. Certainly, this is still only a very rudimentary cult, but that is because the individual personality is

¹ See above, pp. 282 ff. Cf. on this same question our article 'Représentations individuelles et représentations collectives', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 6 (1898), 273 ff.

still indistinct, since it is given little value, and so the cult that expresses it cannot yet be very developed. But to the extent that individuals are more differentiated from one another and the person has increased in value, the corresponding cult has a larger place in the whole of religious life, even as it is more hermetically closed to the outside.

The existence of individual cults suggests nothing, then, that contradicts or confounds a sociological explanation of religion; for the religious forces to which they are addressed are merely individualized forms of collective forces. Thus, while religion seems to dwell entirely in the innermost self of the individual, the living spring that feeds it is still to be found in society. We can now judge the worth of that radical individualism that would make religion something purely individual: it is a misperception of the fundamental conditions of religious life. If it has remained until now in the state of theoretical aspirations that have never been realized, this is because it is unrealizable. A philosophy can indeed be elaborated in the silence of inner meditation, but not a faith. For a faith is above all warmth, life, enthusiasm, the exaltation of all mental activity, the transport of the individual beyond himself. Now, without leaving the self, how could he add to the energies he has? How could he surpass himself with his forces alone? The only source of heat where we might warm ourselves morally is that formed by the society of our peers; the only moral forces with which we might sustain and increase our own are those we attribute to others. Let us even allow that there really are beings more or less analogous to those that mythologies represent to us. For them to exercise the useful influence that is their rationale, one must believe in them. Now, beliefs work only when they are shared. One can certainly maintain them for a time through wholly personal effort; but they are neither born nor acquired in this way. It is even doubtful that they can be preserved under these conditions. In fact, the man who has real faith has an irrepressible need to spread it; to do this, he leaves his isolation, approaches others, and seeks to convince them, and it is the ardour of their convictions that sustains his own. His faith would quickly subside if it remained alone.

What is true of religious individualism is true of religious universalism as well. Far from being an exclusive attribute of a few great religions, we have found it not at the base, of course, but at the

summit of the Australian system. Bunjil, Daramulun, Baiame are not simple tribal gods; each of them is recognized by a plurality of different tribes. Their cult is, in a sense, international. This conception is therefore quite close to that found in the most recent theologies. So certain writers have believed that for this reason they should deny its authenticity, unquestionable as it is.

Now, we have been able to show how this conception was formed. Neighbouring tribes, even of the same civilization, cannot avoid constant contact with one another. All sorts of circumstances provide occasion for such contact: outside of commerce, which is rudimentary, there are marriages, for international marriages are very frequent in Australia. In the course of these encounters, men naturally become conscious of the moral kinship that unites them. They have the same social organization, the same division into phratries, clans, matrimonial classes; they practise the same rites of initiation or very similar rites. Mutual borrowings or conventions serve to reinforce these spontaneous similarities. The gods to which such clearly identical institutions are attached could hardly remain separate in people's minds. Everything brought them together; and so, even supposing that each tribe has elaborated the notion in its own way, they must necessarily have tended to fuse with one another. Moreover, it is likely that they were originally conceived at intertribal assemblies. For they are above all gods of initiation, and different tribes are generally represented at ceremonies of initiation. Sacred beings were then formed that were not attached to any geographically fixed society, not because they had an extra-social origin, but because beyond these geographical groupings, others already exist whose contours are more indistinct. They do not have clear borders but include all sorts of neighbouring and related tribes. The very particular social life that emerges tends, therefore, to spread over an unlimited area. Quite naturally, the mythological personalities that correspond to it have the same character; their sphere of influence is not circumscribed; they glide above the particular tribes and above space. They are the great international gods.

Now, there is nothing in this situation that is peculiar to Australian societies. There is no people, no state, that is not involved with another society that is more or less unlimited and includes all peoples, or states with which they are directly or indirectly in

contact. There is no national life that is not dominated by an inherently international collective life. As we go forward in history, these international groupings take on greater importance and scope. Thus we glimpse how in certain cases, the universalist tendency could have developed to the point of affecting not only the highest ideas of the religious system but the very principles on which they rest.

II

There is something eternal in religion, then, that is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively cloaked itself. No society can exist that does not feel the need at regular intervals to sustain and reaffirm the collective feelings and ideas that constitute its unity and its personality. Now, this moral remaking can be achieved only by means of meetings, assemblies, or congregations in which individuals, brought into close contact, reaffirm in common their common feelings: hence those ceremonies whose goals, results, and methods do not differ in kind from properly religious ceremonies. What essential difference is there between an assembly of Christians commemorating the principal moments in the life of Christ, or Jews celebrating either the exodus from Egypt or the giving of the ten commandments, and a meeting of citizens commemorating the institution of a new moral charter or some great event in national life?

If we have some difficulty today imagining those festivals and ceremonies of the future, that is because we are in a period of transition and moral mediocrity. The great things of the past, those that inspired our fathers, no longer excite the same ardour in us, either because they have entered into common usage to the point where we take them for granted, or because they no longer answer to our current aspirations; and yet nothing has come along to replace them. We can no longer become passionate about principles in whose name Christianity enjoined masters to treat their slaves humanely, and furthermore, Christianity's idea of equality and human brotherhood seems to us today to leave too much room for unjust inequalities. Its pity for the humble seems too platonic; we would wish for a pity that was more efficacious. But we do not yet see clearly what this should be nor how it might be realized in the world of facts. In short, the ancient gods grow old or die, and others are not yet born. Hence the

futility of Comte's attempt to organize a religion with old historic memories artificially reawakened: it is from life itself, and not from a dead past, that a living cult can emerge.

But this state of uncertainty and confused agitation cannot go on for ever. A day will come when our societies will once again experience times of creative effervescence and new ideas will surge up, new formulas will arise that will serve to guide humanity for a time. And having lived during these times, men will spontaneously experience the need to revive them through thought now and then, that is, to sustain the memory of them by means of festivals that regularly recreate their fruits. We have already seen how the French Revolution instituted a whole cycle of festivals to preserve the principles that inspired it in a state of perpetual youth. If the institution quickly perished, that is because revolutionary faith lasted only for a little while; disappointments and discouragement rapidly followed after the first moment of enthusiasm. But although the work was aborted, it allows us to imagine what it might have been under other conditions; and everything leads us to think that sooner or later it will be taken up again. There are no immortal gospels, and there is no reason to believe that humanity is henceforth incapable of conceiving new ones. As for knowing in advance the symbols in which the new faith will be expressed, if they will or will not resemble those of the past, if they will be more adequate to the reality they are meant to translate, this is a matter that surpasses human faculties of prediction and is, moreover, beside the point.

But festivals, rites—in a word, the cult—are not all there is to religion. It is not only a system of practices, it is also a system of ideas whose purpose is to express the world; we have seen that even the most humble religions have their cosmology. Whatever the relation between these two elements of religious life, they are none the less very different. One is turned toward action, which it solicits and regulates; the other toward thought, which it enriches and organizes. They do not then depend on the same conditions, and consequently there is reason to wonder if the second answers to necessities as universal and as permanent as does the first.

When we ascribe specific features to religious thought, when we believe that it functions to express, through its own unique methods, an aspect of the real that eludes ordinary knowledge and science, we naturally refuse to grant that the speculative role of religion might

ever fall into decline. But the analysis of the facts has not seemed to us to demonstrate this specificity. The religion we have just studied is one of those in which the symbols used are the most disconcerting to reason. Everything in it seems mysterious. Those beings that participate at once in the most heterogeneous realms, multiply endlessly without ceasing to be one, fragment without diminishing, seem at first sight to belong to an entirely different world from the one we live in. Some have even gone so far as to say that the thought that built this world was utterly ignorant of the laws of logic. Never, perhaps, has the contrast between reason and faith been more pronounced. Therefore, if there were one moment in history when their heterogeneity ought to have been clearly in evidence, this was it. Yet, contrary to appearances, we have verified that the realities to which religious speculation is applied are the same realities that will later serve as the objects of scientific reflection: nature, man, and society. The mystery that seems to surround them is entirely superficial and dissipates upon closer observation: lift the veil with which the mythological imagination has cloaked them, and they appear as they are. Religion endeavours to translate these realities into an intelligible language that is no different in kind from the language employed by science; both involve connecting things to one another, establishing internal relations between them, classifying them, and systematizing them.

We have even seen that the basic notions of scientific logic have a religious origin. Of course, in order to use them science submits them to a new elaboration; it purges them of any adventitious elements; in general, in all its projects science brings to bear a critical spirit that religion ignores; science surrounds itself with precautions in order to 'avoid haste and bias', to hold passions, prejudice, and all subjective influences at arm's length. But these methodological improvements are not enough to differentiate science from religion. Both, in this respect, pursue the same goal; scientific thought is merely a more perfect form of religious thought. It seems natural, then, that religion should progressively fade as science becomes more adept at completing its task.

And indeed, there is no doubt that this regression has taken place over the course of history. Offspring of religion, science tends to be substituted for religion in all areas that concern the cognitive and intellectual functions. Christianity has already definitively

consecrated this substitution with regard to material phenomena. Seeing matter as the profane thing par excellence, it has easily abandoned knowledge of it to an alien discipline, *tradidit mundum hominum disputationi*.* So the natural sciences could be established and their authority recognized without great difficulties. But Christianity could not so easily detach itself from the world of souls; for it is above all over souls that the god of the Christians aspires to reign. This is why, for a long time, the idea of submitting psychological life to science seemed like a sort of profanation; even today it is still repellent to many minds. Yet experimental and comparative psychology now exists and we must reckon with it today. But the world of religious and moral life still remains off limits. The great majority of men continue to believe that this is an order of things where the mind can penetrate only by special paths. Hence the strong resistance one encounters every time one tries to treat religious and moral phenomena scientifically. But despite oppositions, these attempts are repeated and this persistence itself allows us to anticipate that this last barrier will give way in the end, and that science will become master even of this protected realm.

This is what the conflict between science and religion is about. People often have an inaccurate idea of it. Some say that science denies religion in principle. But religion exists; it is a system of given facts; in short, it is a reality. How could science deny a reality? Moreover, insofar as religion is action, insofar as it is a human way of living, science could not possibly take its place, for if it expresses life, it does not create it. Science can indeed seek to explain faith, but by this very fact it presupposes it. So there is no conflict except on one limited point. Of the two functions that religion originally performed, one exists, but only one, which tends increasingly to escape it: that is the speculative function. What science disputes in religion is not its right to exist but the right to be dogmatic about the nature of things, the kind of special competence it claimed for its knowledge of man and the world.* In fact, religion does not know itself. It knows neither what it is made of nor what needs it satisfies. Far from handing down the law to science, it is itself an object of scientific study! And on the other hand, since apart from the reality to which scientific reflection applies, religious speculation has no proper object, religion clearly cannot play the same role in the future that it has in the past.

Yet it seems called upon to transform itself rather than to disappear.

We have said that there is something eternal in religion, namely the cult, the faith. But men cannot celebrate ceremonies for which they see no rationale, nor accept a faith they cannot understand. To spread it, or simply to maintain it, one must justify it—in other words, generate a theory of it. A theory of this kind is, of course, bound to rely on various sciences from the moment they exist: first, the social sciences, since religious faith has its origins in society; then psychology, since society is a synthesis of human consciousnesses; and of course the natural sciences, since man and society are a function of the universe and can be separated from it only artificially.

But as important as these borrowings from the sciences might be, they would not suffice; for faith is above all an impulse to act, and science, even pushed to its limits, always remains at a distance from action. Science is fragmentary, incomplete; it progresses slowly and is never finished; life cannot wait. Theories that are meant to promote living and acting are therefore compelled to run ahead of science and complete it prematurely. They are possible only if the demands of practice and vital necessities, such as we feel without any clear perception, push thought ahead of what science allows us to confirm. Thus religions, even the most rational and secularized, cannot and will never be able to dispense with a very special sort of speculation that, while having the same objects as science itself, could never be properly scientific: in it, the obscure intuitions of sensation and sentiment often take the place of logic. On the one hand, this speculation resembles the kind we encounter in older religions; but on the other, it is quite distinctive. While claiming the right to go beyond science, it must begin by knowing science and finding inspiration in it.

Once the authority of science is established, it must be reckoned with; one can go further than science under the pressure of necessity, but science is the starting point. One can affirm nothing that science denies, deny nothing that it affirms, establish nothing that does not rest, directly or indirectly, on the principles borrowed from it. From then on, faith no longer exerts the same hegemony as before over the system of ideas that we can continue to call religious. It is countered by a rival power that, born from it, submits it henceforth to its criticism and control. And all indicators predict that this control will

become ever more extensive and effective, with no possibility of assigning a limit to its future influence.

III

But if the basic notions of science are religious in origin, how could religion generate them? The connections between logic and religion are not immediately apparent. Since the reality that religious thought expresses is society, the question can even present itself in the following terms, which will make the difficulty even more evident: what could make social life such an important source of logical life? Nothing, it seems, predestined it for this role; for it was obviously not to satisfy their speculative needs that men associated with one another.

Many will perhaps think us foolhardy to broach a problem of such complexity here. To treat it properly, the sociological conditions of knowledge ought to be better known than they are; we are only beginning to glimpse a few of them. Yet the question is so serious, and it is so directly implied by all that has gone before, that we must make an effort not to leave it unanswered. Moreover, it may now be possible to set forth a few general principles that are at least of a kind to shed light on the solution.

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

If, as usually happens, we consider the concept as merely a general idea, the problem seems insoluble. Indeed, the individual on his own can compare his perceptions or images, sort out what they have in common, and—in a word—generalize. So it is not easy to perceive why generalization would be possible only in and through society. But first, it is inadmissible that logical thought should be characterized exclusively by the widest scope of the representations that constitute it. If particular ideas have nothing logical about them, why should general ideas be any different? The general exists only in the particular: it is the particular simplified and impoverished. The general, then, cannot have virtues and privileges that the particular does not have. Conversely, if conceptual thought can apply to the genus, species, and variety, however limited, why could it not extend to the

individual, in other words, to the limit toward which the representation tends as its scope narrows? In fact, concepts certainly exist that have individuals as objects. In every kind of religion, the gods are individualities distinct from one another; yet they are conceived, not perceived. Every people imagines its historical or legendary heroes in a certain way, which varies according to the times. These representations are conceptual. Finally, each of us devises a certain notion of individuals with regard to their character, their appearance, the distinctive features of their physical and moral temperament: these notions are real concepts. Of course, they are generally rather crudely formed; but even among scientific concepts, are there many that are perfectly adequate to their object? In this respect, there are merely differences of degree between the two.

Therefore, the concept must be defined by other features. It is the antithesis of perceptible representations of any kind—sensations, perceptions, or images—owing to the following properties.

Perceptible representations are in perpetual flux; they push each other like currents in a stream, and while they last they are constantly transformed. Each one is a function of the precise moment it takes place. We are never certain of finding a perception again as we first experienced it; for if the thing perceived has not changed, it is we who are no longer the same. The concept is, by contrast, outside of time and becoming; it is set apart from all agitation; we might say that it is situated in a different region of the mind, one that is more serene and calm. The concept does not move on its own, by an internal and spontaneous development; on the contrary, it resists change. It is a way of thinking that is fixed and crystallized at any moment in time.¹ To the extent that it is what it must be, it is immutable. If it changes, it is not because it is its nature to change, but because we have discovered some imperfection in it and it must be rectified. The system of concepts with which we think in everyday life is one that expresses the vocabulary of our mother tongue; for each word translates a concept. Now, language is fixed; it changes only very slowly, and consequently it is similar to the conceptual organization it expresses. The scientist finds himself in the same situation in relation to the special terminology used by the science to

¹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. i (New York: Macmillan, 1890), 464.

which he is dedicated, and consequently in relation to the special system of concepts to which this terminology corresponds. He can innovate, of course, but his innovations are always a sort of violence done to ways of established thinking.

Even as it is relatively immutable, the concept is, if not universal, at least universalizable. A concept is not my concept; it is common to me and to others, or at least it can be communicated to them. It is impossible for me to pass a sensation of my consciousness along to someone else's consciousness; it has the stamp of my body and my personality, and it cannot be detached from me. All I can do is to invite someone else to confront the same object as I have done and open himself to its influence. By contrast, conversation, intellectual commerce between men, consists of an exchange of concepts. The concept is an essentially impersonal representation: through it, human intellects commune.¹

The nature of the concept, defined in this way, speaks of its origins. If it is common to everyone, this is because it is the work of the community. It does not bear the imprint of any particular intelligence, since it is elaborated by a unique intelligence in which all others meet and come, in some sense, to nourish themselves. If it has more stability than sensations or images, this is because collective representations are more stable than individual representations. For while the individual is sensitive even to slight changes in his internal or external surroundings, only events of sufficient importance can manage to affect society's mental position. Every time we are in the presence of a *type*² of thought or action that uniformly imposes itself on particular wills or intellects, that pressure exerted on the individual discloses the intervention of the collectivity. Moreover, we

¹ This universality of the concept must not be confused with its generality: these are very different things. What we call universality is the concept's property of being communicated to a number of minds, and even in principle to all minds. But this communicability is entirely independent of its scope. A concept that applies only to a single object, whose scope is thereby minimal, can be universal in the sense that it is the same for all understandings. The concept of a deity is of this kind.

² Some will object that often, in the individual, solely by the effect of repetition, ways of acting or thinking become fixed and crystallized in the form of habits that resist change. But habit is merely a tendency to repeat an action or an idea automatically whenever circumstances provoke it. Habit does not imply that the idea or action is an exemplary type, proposed or imposed on the mind or the will. It is only when a type of this kind is pre-established, that is, when a rule or norm is instituted, that social action can and must be presumed.

were saying earlier that the concepts with which we ordinarily think are those that are consigned in the vocabulary. Now, it is unquestionably true that language, and consequently the system of concepts that it translates, is the product of a collective elaboration. What it expresses is the way that society as a whole imagines the objects of experience. The notions that correspond to the diverse elements of language are therefore collective representations.

The very contents of these notions are revealing in the same way. Indeed, there are hardly any words, even among those we commonly use, whose meanings do not to some extent surpass the limits of our personal experience. A term often expresses things we have never perceived, experiences we have never had or have never witnessed. Even when we know some of the objects to which it is related, this is merely by way of particular examples that illustrate the idea, but which in themselves alone would never have sufficed to constitute it. A word contains a condensed version of a whole body of knowledge in which I have not collaborated, a body of knowledge that is more than individual; and it reaches so far beyond me that I cannot even appropriate all its results. Who among us knows all the words of the tongue he speaks, and the integral meaning of every word?

This remark allows us to determine what we mean by saying that concepts are collective representations. If they are common to a whole social group, this is not because they represent a simple average among corresponding individual representations; for then they would be poorer than these (individual representations) in intellectual content, while in reality they are rich with a knowledge that surpasses that of the average individual. They are not abstractions that would have reality only in particular minds but representations every bit as concrete as those that the individual can construct from his personal surroundings: they correspond to the way in which that special entity, society, thinks about the things from its own experience. If, in fact, concepts are most often general ideas, if they express categories and classes rather than particular objects, this is because the singular and variable qualities of beings only rarely interest society; because of its scope, it can hardly be affected by any but their more general and permanent properties. Thus society's attention is turned to generalities: its nature is most often to see things in large masses and in the form they most generally take. But this is not a necessity; and in any case, even when these representations appear in

their usual generic character, they are still the work of society and are rich with its experience.

And this, moreover, is why we value conceptual thought. If concepts were merely general ideas, they would not do much to enrich our knowledge; for the general, as we have already said, contains nothing more than the particular. But if those concepts are above all collective representations, they add all the wisdom and knowledge the collectivity has accumulated in the course of the centuries to what our personal experience can teach us. To think in concepts is not simply to see the real through the most general; it is to project onto sensation a light that illuminates, penetrates, and transforms it. To conceive of a thing is, in addition to apprehending more clearly its essential elements, to situate it as a whole; for every civilization has its own particular organized system of concepts. Confronted by this system of notions, the individual mind is in the same situation as Plato's *voûς** confronted by the world of Ideas. It endeavours to assimilate them, for it needs them to be able to communicate with its peers; but this assimilation is always imperfect. Each of us sees them in his own way. There are some that escape us altogether, that remain outside our circle of vision; and there are others that we perceive only in certain aspects. There are some, indeed many, that we distort by thinking about them; for since they are collective in nature, they cannot be individualized without being retouched, modified, and consequently distorted. As a result, we have so much trouble understanding that we often lie to one another without meaning to. This is because we all use the same words without giving them the same meaning.

We can now begin to see society's part in the origin of logical thought. This is possible only from the moment when, beyond the transitory representations he owes to tangible experience, man has begun to conceive a whole world of stable ideals, the common ground of intellects. To think logically, in effect, is always in some measure to think impersonally; it is also to think *sub specie aeternitatis*.* Impersonality and stability—these are the two characteristics of truth. Now, logical life obviously presupposes that man knows, even in a muddled way, that there is a truth distinct from tangible appearance. But how could he arrive at this idea? People most often argue the point as though this idea must have spontaneously occurred to man when he opened his eyes on the world. Yet there is nothing in

immediate experience that might suggest it, and a great deal to contradict it. Furthermore, the child and the animal have no notion of it. History shows, moreover, that it took centuries to emerge and evolve. In our western world, it is with the great thinkers of Greece that it first became clearly conscious of itself and its implicit consequences. And when the discovery was made, it was cause for wonder, which Plato expressed magnificently.

But while it was only in this period that the idea was expressed in philosophical formulas, it necessarily pre-existed in a state of obscure feeling. The philosophers sought to elucidate this feeling; they did not create it. So that they might reflect on it and analyse it, they had to receive it first and to know where it came from, that is, what experience it was based on. It was based on collective experience. Impersonal thought was revealed to humanity for the first time in the form of collective thought; and it is impossible to see how this revelation could have been made any other way. Solely because society exists, there also exists—outside of individual sensations and images—a whole system of representations that enjoy marvellous properties. Through them, men understand one another, intellects can intermingle. These representations have a kind of force, a moral ascendancy by virtue of which they affect particular minds.

When the individual realizes, even vaguely, that above his private representations a world of generic notions exists according to which he must regulate his ideas, he begins to see a whole intellectual realm in which he participates but that surpasses him. This is a first intuition of the realm of truth. Of course, as soon as he became conscious of this higher intellectuality, he used it to scrutinize nature; he tried to discover where these eminent representations derived their prerogatives and, to the extent that he thought he had discovered their causes, he undertook to put these causes into operation himself in order to elicit their implicit effects through his own powers; that is, he granted himself the right to invent concepts. Thus, the faculty of conceptualization was individualized. But in order to understand the origins of this function, it must be linked to the social conditions on which it depends.

Some will object that we are showing only one side of the concept, that its role is not only to ensure the agreement of minds but also, and even more, their agreement with the nature of things. It seems that its whole rationale rests solely on the condition of being true, or

objective, and that its impersonality must be merely a consequence of its objectivity. It is in things, conceived as adequately as possible, that minds should communicate. We do not deny that conceptual development goes partly in this direction. The concept that was originally taken as true because it is collective tends to become collective only if it is held as true: we demand its credentials before granting it credence. But in the first place, we must not lose sight of the fact that still today, the great majority of the concepts we use are not constituted methodically; we take them from language, that is, from common experience, without submitting them to any prior criticism. Scientifically elaborated and criticized concepts are always in the very weak minority.* In addition, between these and those that take their authority solely from the fact that they are collective, there are merely differences of degree. A collective representation, because it is collective, already presents guarantees of objectivity, for otherwise it could not be generalized and maintained with sufficient persistence. If it were in disagreement with the nature of things, it could not have acquired an extensive and prolonged hold on people's minds. Basically, the confidence that inspires scientific concepts rests on the fact that they are capable of being methodically controlled. Now, a collective representation is necessarily subjected to an indefinitely repeated test: the men who adhere to it verify it by their own experience. Therefore it could not possibly be inadequate to its object. It can express it, of course, with the help of imperfect symbols, but scientific symbols themselves are never anything but approximate. It is precisely this principle that is at the basis of the method that we are following in the study of religious phenomena: we regard as axiomatic that religious beliefs, as odd as they sometimes seem, have a truth that must be discovered.¹

Conversely, it is hardly the case that concepts, even when they are constructed according to all the rules of science, derive their authority only from their objective value. It is not enough for them to be true for them to be believed. If they are not in harmony with other beliefs, other opinions, in a word with the whole gamut of collective representations, they will be denied; minds will be closed to them;

¹ Far from lacking social value, the very fact that a representation has a social origin confirms it.

they will be as if they never were. If today the stamp of science is usually sufficient to give them a kind of privileged credit, that is because we have faith in science. But this faith is not essentially different from religious faith. The value that we ascribe to science depends, in short, on the idea that we, collectively, have of its nature and its role in life—that is, it expresses a state of opinion. This is because everything in social life, even science itself, rests on opinion. Of course, we can make opinion a subject of study and make a science of it—this is the chief aim of sociology. But the science of opinion does not make opinion; it can only shed light on it, make it more self-conscious. And this, it is true, can lead to changing it. Yet science continues to depend on opinion even when it seems to legislate it, for as we have shown, it is from opinion that science takes the necessary force to act on opinion.¹

To say that concepts express the way that society imagines things is to see, too, that conceptual thought is contemporaneous with humanity. We refuse, therefore, to see it as the product of a later culture. A man who did not think in concepts would not be a man; for he would not be a social being. Reduced to only individual perceptions, he would be inseparable from the animal. If the contrary thesis could be sustained, that is because the concept was defined by features that are not essential to it. It was identified with the general idea² and with a general idea that was clearly delimited and circumscribed.³ Under these conditions, it could seem that lower societies are not familiar with the concept properly speaking, for they have only rudimentary processes of generalization, and the notions they employ are not generally defined. But most of our present concepts have the same indeterminacy; we hardly bother defining them except in discussions and when we are doing scholarly work. On the other hand, we have seen that to conceptualize is not to generalize. To think conceptually is not simply to isolate and group together qualities common to a certain number of objects; it is to subsume the variable to the permanent, the individual to the social. And since logical thought begins with the concept, it follows that it has always existed; there was no historical period when men would have lived in

¹ Cf. above, p. 156.

² Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris: Alcan, 1910), 131–8.

³ Ibid. 446.

chronic confusion and contradiction. Certainly, we must grant the enormous differences between logic at diverse historical moments; it develops like societies themselves. But as real as these differences are, they must not obscure the similarities, which are no less essential.

IV

We can now broach a final question that was already posed in our Introduction,¹ and which has been implicit throughout this entire work. We have seen that at least some categories are social things. The question is, where does this quality come from?

Of course, since categories are themselves derived from concepts, we readily understand that they are the work of the collectivity. No concepts present the signs of a collective representation to the same degree. Indeed, their stability and their impersonality are such that they have often passed for being absolutely universal and immutable. Moreover, since they express the fundamental conditions of understanding between minds, it seems obvious that they could be elaborated only by society.

But the problem is more complex where categories are concerned. For they are social in another sense and to the second degree. Not only do they come from society, but the very things they express are social. Not only has society instituted them, but they are different aspects of the social entity that serves as their contents. The category of genus began by being indistinguishable from the concept of human group; it is the rhythm of social life that is at the basis of the category of time; it is the space occupied by society that has provided the material for the category of space; it is the collective force that was the prototype for the concept of efficacious force, an essential element of the category of causality. However, categories are not constructed to be applied uniquely to the social realm; they extend to the whole of reality. How is it, then, that the models on which they were built were borrowed from society?

The answer is that these are major concepts that play a leading part in knowledge. Indeed, the function of categories is to dominate and encompass all other concepts: they are the permanent

¹ See above, pp. 18-19.

frameworks of mental life. Now, to encompass such an object, they must be modelled on a reality of equal scope.

Of course, the relations they express exist implicitly in individual consciousnesses. The individual lives in time, and, as we have said, he has a certain sense of temporal orientation. He is situated at a fixed point in space, and one could argue, with good reason, that all his sensations have some spatial content.¹ He has a feeling for resemblances; similar representations attract one another, come together inside him, and the new representation formed by their coming together already has a certain generic character. We also sense a certain regularity in the order of succession of phenomena; even the animal is not incapable of this. Only all these relations are personal to the individual who is engaged in them, and so the notion that he can profit from them cannot extend beyond his narrow horizon.

The generic images that are formed in my consciousness by the fusion of similar images represent only the objects that I have directly perceived; nothing here can give me the idea of a class, that is, of a framework capable of comprehending the *total* group of all possible objects that satisfy the same condition. Yet the idea of the group would have to be prior, and the spectacle of our inner life alone would not be enough to awaken it in us. But above all there is no individual experience, however broad and prolonged, that could make us even suspect the existence of a total genus that would encompass the universality of beings, and of which other genera would be merely species coordinated among, or subordinate to, one another. This notion of the *whole*, which is at the basis of the classifications we have cited, cannot come to us from the individual who is himself merely a part in relation to the whole, and who never reaches more than an infinitesimal fraction of reality. And yet there is no category more essential; for since the role of categories is to encompass all other concepts, the category par excellence must apparently be the very concept of *totality*. The theorists of knowledge ordinarily postulate totality as if it were self-generated, although it infinitely surpasses the contents of any individual consciousness, taken separately.

For the same reasons, the space that I know through my senses,

¹ James, *The Principles of Psychology*, i. 134.

where I am the centre and everything is arranged in relation to me, could not be total space, which contains everyone's particular spatial scope and in which, moreover, these are coordinated in relation to impersonal reference points common to all individuals. Similarly, the concrete duration that I sense flowing in me and with me could not approach the idea of total time, for my sense of duration expresses merely the rhythm of my individual life; the idea of total time, on the other hand, corresponds to the rhythm of a life that does not belong to any individual in particular but is one in which everyone participates.¹ Likewise, the regularities I can perceive in the way that my sensations succeed one another can indeed have value for me; they explain how, when I observe the first of two phenomena whose constant linkage I have experienced, I then expect the second. But this state of personal expectation should not be confused with the conception of a universal order of succession that overlays the totality of minds and events.

Since the world expressed by the total system of concepts is the world that society represents, society alone can provide us with the most general notions according to which it must be represented. Only a subject that encompasses all particular subjects is capable of encompassing such an object. Since the universe exists only insofar as it is thought about, and since it is thought about in its totality only by society, it takes place within it; it becomes an element of its inner life, and thus the universe is itself the total genus outside of which nothing exists. The concept of totality is merely the abstract form of the concept of society: it is the whole that includes all things, the supreme classification that encloses all other classifications. Such is the underlying principle of those primitive classifications in which the beings of all realms are situated and classified in social frameworks by the same right as men.² But if the world is inside society, the space society occupies merges with space as a whole. We have seen, indeed, how everything has its assigned place in the social space; and the best indication of just how much this total space

¹ We often speak of space and time as if they were merely concrete extension and duration—things that can be experienced by individual consciousness but diminished by abstraction. In reality, they are entirely different kinds of representations, built out of other elements, following a very different plan, in pursuit of equally different ends.

² Basically, the concepts of totality, society, and deity are really just different aspects of one and the same notion.

differs from the concrete scopes we perceive through our senses is the fact that this localization is entirely ideal and in no way resembles what it would be if it were dictated to us by tangible experience.¹ For the same reason, the rhythm of collective life dominates and encompasses the varied rhythms of all the constituent lives that produce it. And so the time that expresses it dominates and encompasses all particular durations. This is total time.

The history of the world was for a long time merely one aspect of the history of society. One begins with the other; the world's historical eras are determined by those of society. What measures this impersonal and global duration, what fixes the reference points that determine its division and organization, are society's movements of concentration and dispersal—more generally, the periodic necessities of collective renewal. If those critical instants are most often attached to some material phenomenon, like the regular recurrence of a particular planet or the change of seasons, that is because objective signs are necessary to make all this essentially social organization tangible. Similarly, the causal relation as collectively posited by the group is independent of any individual consciousness; it glides above all minds and all particular events. It is a law having impersonal value. We have shown that the law of causality seems to have been born in this way.

There is another reason why the constituent elements of categories must have been borrowed from social life: the relations they express could become conscious only in and through society. If they were in a sense immanent in the life of the individual, that individual had no reason or means to grasp them, to think about them, to make them explicit, and to develop them into distinct notions. To orient himself personally in space, to know when he had to satisfy different organic needs, he had no need to fashion for himself, once and for all, a conceptual representation of time or space. Plenty of animals know how to find their way back to familiar places; they return to these places at the appropriate time, without having any category for them; sensations are adequate to guide them automatically. They would be adequate for man if his movements had to satisfy only individual needs. In order to recognize that one thing resembles others with

¹ See Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, 'De quelques formes primitives de classification', *L'Année sociologique*, 6 (1903), 40 ff.

which we already have some experience, it is in no way necessary to rank these things in genera and species: the way that similar images attract each other and fuse is adequate to suggest resemblance. The impression of having already seen or experienced something does not imply any classification. In order to distinguish between the things we must seek and the things we must flee, we merely have to connect their effects to their causes by a logical link, when individual convenience alone is at stake. Purely empirical sequences, strong connections between concrete representations, are equally sure guides where the will is concerned. Not only does the animal have no others, but very often our private practice assumes nothing more. The wise man is he who has a very clear sense of what he must do, but for the most part he is incapable of translating this sense into law.

It is different where society is concerned. Society is possible only if the individuals and things that compose it are distributed into different groups, that is, classes, and if these groups themselves are classified in relation to each other. Society presupposes, therefore, a self-conscious organization that is none other than a classification. This organization of society is naturally communicated to the space it occupies. To prevent any collision, a fixed portion of space must be allocated to every particular group. In other words, the total space must be divided, differentiated, oriented, and these divisions and orientations must be known to every mind. In addition, every summons to a feast, a hunt, or a military expedition implies that dates are fixed and agreed upon, and as a consequence that a common time is established that everyone conceives in the same way. Finally, the cooperation of several people in pursuit of a common goal is possible only if they agree on the relation between this goal and the means to attain it, namely if a similar causal relation is granted by all the participants in the enterprise. Therefore, it is not surprising that social time, social space, social classes, and collective causality are at the basis of corresponding categories, since it is in their social forms that different relations were grasped for the first time with any clarity by human consciousness.

To sum up, society is in no way the illogical or alogical, incoherent, and chimerical being people too often like to imagine. Quite the contrary, the collective consciousness is the highest form of psychic life, since it is a consciousness of consciousnesses. Situated outside

and above individual and local contingencies, it sees things only in their permanent and essential aspect, which it embodies in notions that can be communicated. Even as it sees things from above, it sees far ahead; at any moment of time it encompasses all of known reality; that is why it alone can provide the mind with frameworks that apply to the totality of beings and that allow us to think about them. The collective consciousness does not create these frameworks artificially; it finds them in itself, merely by becoming conscious of them. They express the ways of being that are encountered at all degrees of reality but appear in true clarity only at the summit, because the extreme complexity of the psychic life that unfolds there necessitates a more highly developed consciousness.

To attribute social origins to logical thought, then, is not to degrade it, diminish its value, or reduce it to a system of artificial combinations; on the contrary, it is to relate it to a cause that implies it naturally. This does not mean, of course, that notions elaborated in this way are instantly adequate to their objects. If society is something universal in relation to the individual, it has a certain individuality as well, with its own physiognomy and idiosyncrasies; it is a particular subject that, as a result, particularizes what it thinks. Therefore, collective representations also contain subjective elements, and must be progressively purified to come closer to things. But as crude as these representations may have been at first, they still bore the seed of a new mentality to which the individual could never have raised himself by his own powers. Henceforth, the way was open to stable, impersonal, and organized thought, which needed only to develop its nature from that point on.

Moreover, the causes that determined this development do seem not to differ specifically from those that brought the initial seed into being. If logical thought tends increasingly to shed the subjective and personal elements it still carried with it in the beginning, that is not because extra-social factors intervened, but because a social life of a new kind was becoming increasingly developed: that international life which was already universalizing religious beliefs. As it extends itself, the collective horizon is enlarged. Society no longer seems like the ultimate whole but becomes part of a much larger whole, one with vague and infinitely expandable borders. As a result, things can no longer stay within the social frameworks in which they were originally classified; they beg to be organized according to their own

principles, and thus logical organization is differentiated from social organization and becomes autonomous. This, it seems, is how the bond that first attached thought to fixed collective individualities becomes increasingly tenuous and thought becomes more impersonal and universalized. Thought that is truly and properly human is not an original given but a product of history; it is an ideal limit, to which we come ever closer but in all likelihood will never attain.

Thus the kind of antinomy so often accepted between science, on the one hand, and morality and religion, on the other, is far from being the case. These different modes of human activity derive, in reality, from one and the same source. Kant understood this, and that is why he made speculative reason and practical reason two different functions of the same faculty. According to him, they are united because they are both oriented toward the same universal. To think rationally is to think according to laws that are everywhere obvious to all reasonable beings. To act morally is to behave according to maxims that might without contradiction be extended to all wills everywhere. In other words, science and morality imply that the individual is capable of raising himself above his own point of view and of living from an impersonal perspective. And, indeed, there is no doubt that this is a feature common to all superior forms of thought and action. Yet the Kantian position does not explain the source of the kind of contradiction man embodies. Why is he compelled to do violence to himself in order to go beyond his individual nature, and conversely, why must the impersonal law lose force as it becomes embodied in individuals? Shall we say that two antagonistic worlds exist in which we participate equally: the world of matter and the senses, on the one hand, and the world of pure and impersonal reason, on the other? But this is merely repeating the question in slightly different terms; for the real point is to know why we must lead two lives at the same time. Why do these two worlds, which seem mutually contradictory, not remain separate, and what makes it necessary for them to mingle, despite their antagonism? The only explanation that has ever been given for this singular necessity is the hypothesis of the fall,* with all the difficulties it implies and which are useless to review here.

By contrast, all mystery disappears once we have recognized that impersonal reason is simply another name for collective thought. For

collective thought is possible only by the grouping together of individuals; so it assumes them, and they in their turn assume it because they can survive only by grouping together. The reign of impersonal aims and truths can come into being only through the cooperation of particular wills and sensibilities, and the reasons they participate in it are the same reasons they cooperate. In short, there is something impersonal in us because there is something social in us, and since social life includes both representations and practices, this impersonality is extended quite naturally to ideas just as it is to acts.

It will be surprising, perhaps, to see us relate the most elevated forms of human mentality to society: the cause seems quite humble with respect to the value we place on the effect. Between the world of the senses and appetites, on the one hand, and that of reason and morality on the other, the distance is so considerable that the second seems it must have been added on to the first only by some creative act. But to attribute this dominant role in the genesis of our nature to society is not to deny that creation; for society indeed wields a creative power that no palpable being can equal. Indeed, all creation, unless it is a mystical operation that eludes science and intelligence, is the product of a synthesis. Now, if the syntheses of particular representations produced within every individual consciousness are already, by themselves, productive of novelties, how much more effective are those vast syntheses of whole consciousnesses that produce societies! A society is the most powerful bundle of physical and moral forces observable in nature. Nowhere else do we find such a wealth of diverse raw material brought to such a degree of concentration. So it is not surprising that a higher life emerges from it that acts on the elements that compose it, raising them to a superior form of existence and transforming them.

Thus, sociology seems called upon to open a new way to the science of man. Until now, we were faced with the following alternative: either to explain man's superior and specific faculties by relating them to inferior forms of being—reason to the senses, mind to matter—which amounted to denying their specificity; or to attach them to some supra-experiential reality that was postulated, but whose existence no observation could establish.* The mind was put in this bind because the individual was taken to be *finis naturae*.* it seemed there was nothing beyond him, at least nothing that science could grasp. But as soon as we recognize that above the individual

there is society, and that society is a system of active forces—not a nominal or rationally created being—a new way of explaining man becomes possible. For him to preserve his distinctive attributes, it is no longer necessary to place them outside experience. At the very least, before going to this extreme, it is appropriate to enquire as to whether what is inside the individual but surpasses him comes from that reality which is supra-individual yet inherent in experience—namely, society.

Of course, we cannot say at this juncture how widely these explanations can be applied and whether they are capable of solving all problems. But it is equally impossible to set limits in advance on how far they can go. What must be done is to test the hypothesis and submit it to the control of facts as methodically as possible. This is what we have tried to do.

APPENDIX

SELECT LIST OF ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND ETHNOLOGISTS WHO INFORMED DURKHEIM'S WORK

Franz Boas (1858–1942), US anthropologist and founder of the *International Journal of American Linguistics*, specialized in the cultures and languages of Native Americans; author of *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911).

Charles Hill-Tout (1858–1944), Canadian anthropologist, produced many ethnographies of Native Americans in western Canada, culminating in *The Far West: The Home of the Salish and Dene* (1907).

Alfred William Howitt (1830–1908), British anthropologist, author of *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (with Lorimer Fison, 1880) and *Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (1904).

Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860–1929) and Francis James Gillen (1855–1912). Spencer made available Australian field data to European and American anthropologists and social theorists. In 1894 he met the postmaster F. J. Gillen, and they subsequently produced several joint publications on Australian Aboriginal societies: *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899); *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (1904); *The Arunta* (1927).

Matilda Coxe Stevenson (1849–1915), US ethnologist and founder of the Women's Anthropological Society of America, specialized in the cultures and languages of Native Americans, especially of Pueblo and Hopi. Author of 'The Sia' (1894) and 'The Zuni Indians' (1904), both appearing in *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*.

Carl Strehlow (1870–1922), German clergyman and anthropologist who worked extensively in Australia, author of the multi-volume *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* (1907).

John Reed Swanton (1873–1958), US ethnologist, focused on migrations of Native Americans, especially in the south-eastern United States. Durkheim, however, was most interested in his work on north-west Native Americans. His work on social structure challenged nineteenth-century evolutionist assumptions. Author of *Contribution to the Ethnologies of the Haida* (1905).

EXPLANATORY NOTES

- 3 *the most primitive*: throughout this book, Durkheim refers to primitive religion and primitive people. To our ears, this vocabulary may sound condescending, and in many ways it is. However, 'primitive' was the standard term to refer to traditional societies marked by a minimal division of labour and by non-industrial technologies. Durkheim, unlike his contemporaries, argued that there is much continuity between traditional and modern societies.

positive science: scientific positivism, the view that knowledge is generated by rigorous observation and analysis, greatly influenced French intellectual life. For Durkheim, positivism is the view that social facts, just like any other facts, can be studied by scientific methods, in this case, the methods established by sociology.

- 5 *developed historically*: Durkheim, like many other turn-of-the-century European intellectuals, held as a scientific principle that it was necessary to provide a genetic account of a phenomenon, tracing it from its most simple to its most complex form, in order to discover its essential nature.

Cartesian principle: René Descartes (1596–1650) argued that knowledge can only be established, link by link, on indubitable first principles.

- 8 *Bachofen . . . McLennan, Morgan*: Jacob Johann Bachofen (1815–87), John Ferguson McLennan (1827–81), and Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–81). Bachofen added the concept of matriarchy to that of patriarchy; McLennan and Morgan had initially reduced kinship to blood lines. McLennan was one of the first to argue, erroneously, that totemism was the most primitive form of religion.
- 12 *Hamelin . . . Kant*: Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a German philosopher, argued that such categories as time and space are universally the same and are imposed on objective reality by the knowing mind. Octave Hamelin (1856–1907), a neo-Kantian, maintained that space is not experienced universally the same. This view contributed toward Durkheim's socializing Kantian categories of understanding.
- 14 *Völkerpsychology*: folk psychology; a school of thought, associated with Wilhelm Wundt, that investigated the language, myth, and customs of a people to understand better the individual psychology.
- 17 *sui generis*: a category of its own; unique.
- 25 *Frazer*: Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941), Scottish anthropologist, author of *The Golden Bough* (1890), a comparative study in folklore, magic, and religion.
- 26 *Spencer*: Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), an English philosopher who

promoted social evolutionary theories, and coined the phrase 'survival of the fittest'.

- 27 *Max Müller*: Friedrich Maximilian Müller (1823–1900), a German philologist, who argued in his *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1861–4) that philology and mythology reveal the origins of religion.

ultima ratio: final argument or last resort.

- 29 *Jevons*: Frank Byron Jevons (1858–1936), a British classicist and philosopher, argued that religion began as an effort to explain such extraordinary events as solar eclipses. Author of *Introduction to the History of Religion* (1902), *Religion in Evolution* (1906), and *Idea of God in Early Religions* (1910).

- 31 *Tylor*: Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), English anthropologist and author of *Anthropology* (1881). Specialized in animism and what he called the 'primitive mentality'.

- 34 *Man contains . . . focus on the self and mediate*: one need not search outside the self because the true self, Atman, and the 'supreme reality', Brahman, are one and the same. Atman is Brahman.

- 39 *totius substantiae*: of the entire substance.

- 41 *science of religions*: Durkheim, like William James, held that religion could be investigated with the objective tools of the scientist.

- 43 *church*: Durkheim used the French word *église* to refer to any religious group or institution.

- 44 *magic*: Durkheim's utilitarian and privatized definition of magic is problematic. In his argument, the distinction between religion and magic is parallel to the distinction between the moral and the utilitarian. The distinction between religion and magic may be helpful in a moral argument, but not in a sociological account, for it does not distinguish types of institutions, but types of human ends. Durkheim himself made the following qualification in the accompanying footnote: 'in making this distinction between magic and religion, we do not mean to imply that they are entirely discontinuous. The borders between the two are often blurred.'

- 54 *Today the existence of God . . . basic principles of morality*: Durkheim is referring to neo-Kantians who, following Kant, argued that the moral life is unimaginable without positing the existence of God (who provides universal standards of morality) and immortality (which permits happiness to be in proportion to virtue).

- 62 *natural phenomena*: throughout Durkheim's career, he argued that humans are naturally social creatures and that the social world belongs to the natural world. Hence, such social facts as population densities, religious institutions, or currents of opinions can be studied as an independent reality just like other natural facts.

- 63 *philology*: the study of language—historical and comparative linguistics—especially as it illuminates cultural histories.
- 64 *Nihil est in intellectu quod non ante fuerit in sensu*: nothing is in the mind that was not first in the senses.
- 87 *The two parts of the analysis . . . overlap*: the structure of the book follows Durkheim's definition of religion. After having defined religion as a set of beliefs and practices that divide the universe between the sacred and profane and that create moral community, Durkheim first discusses religious beliefs and then he turns to religious practices. However, this structure must not obscure Durkheim's profound observation: practices are shaped by beliefs, but they also inform beliefs.

95 *subincision*: a cut made along the underside of the penis.

- 98 *Holy Ark*: the Holy Ark (*l'arche sainte*), also known as the ark of God, the ark of the Lord, or the ark of the covenant, contained the sacred treasures of Israel, namely, the two tablets of the law (see 1 Kings 8: 9), and perhaps also Aaron's rod and an urn holding manna. It represented the presence of God, and it was considered sacred to such an extent that if an unauthorized person touched it, that person was to be put to death (see 2 Samuel 6: 6–7).

the nurtunja and the waninga: subject to much variation, these are typically made of a vertical support, for example several lances tied together, and then decorated from top to bottom with grass, cords of hair, or feathers.

- 118 *the nomen and the cognomen*: of the usually three names of an ancient Roman, the nomen is the second and the cognomen is the third.

nothing known that is not classified: here Durkheim suggested that the concept 'totality' springs from religious origins. In the Conclusion, Durkheim noted that 'the concepts of totality, society, and deity are really just different aspects of one and the same notion'.

- 119 *πάντα πλήρη θεῶν*: everything is full of gods.

- 128 *metempsychosis*: transmigration; at death, the passing of the soul into another body, human or animal.

Wundt: Wilhelm Max Wundt (1832–1920), a German social and experimental psychologist and author of the ten-volume work *Folk Psychology*. He developed techniques to investigate the psychology of a people as opposed to that of individuals.

- 129 *blood-covenant*: oaths taken by two or more individuals who swear mutual loyalty, usually on pain of death, after exchanging blood with one another through cuts made on each of their bodies.

- 131 *fetishism*: reverence toward an object believed to have magical power to protect or lend aid.

- 134 *Thus the primary form of individual religion . . . public religion*: this is the conclusion for which Durkheim had been preparing the reader: private

religion is not the source of public religion, but rather the private presupposes the public.

- 141 *real forces*: social forces, like physical forces, impinge on humans from the outside and can be measured and compared. Durkheim was eager to describe the subject matter of sociology as something which could be investigated scientifically.
- 155 *An individual or collective object . . . harmful effects*: in Durkheim's view, respect and moral authority, not fear or utilitarian calculation, lie at the heart of religion.
- 156 *But science . . . from opinion itself*: since the Enlightenment it has become standard to oppose opinion and authority, which are associated with religion, to facts and knowledge, which are associated with science. Here Durkheim put forth the radical view that science itself is a social institution that depends on opinion.
- 157 *4 August*: France's newly established National Assembly abolished all feudal privileges on 4 August 1789. Durkheim often referred to the French Revolution as an example of religious effervescence. He often employed a religious vocabulary to describe what others interpreted as secular events.
- 159 *We speak a language . . . not of our making*: here Durkheim challenges modern subjectivism, that is, the view that the individual alone creates his or her own moral and aesthetic world.
- 161 *The ties . . . slack and weak*: here one must remember that the tribe is the 'larger society' that includes the various clans.
- 169 *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor*: first in the world, fear created the gods.
Leviathans: formidable sea monsters depicted in the Bible; also, thanks to Thomas Hobbes, a totalitarian, or at least an exceedingly muscular, government.
- 170 *we cannot make something unlimited from something limited*: the opposition of the French *étendu* (something extended) to *inétendu* (something unextended) is parallel to René Descartes's mind-body opposition, *res extensa* and *res inextensa*.
- 173 *They can turn . . . very powerful being*: here Durkheim battled with a form of materialistic empiricism that maintains that the complete description of an object is derived from the senses alone.
- 187 *Alcheringa . . . the period in which these fabulous beings are thought to have lived*: current literature on Australian Aboriginal religion often—and somewhat misleadingly—refers to this as 'dream time'. This term attempts to capture the idea that one today can participate in this mythological age of the past.
- 200 *Leibniz*: Gottfried Wilhelm, Baron von Leibniz (1646–1716), a German philosopher and mathematician, who held that the basic building blocks of the universe are simple substances which he called monads.

Above and beyond . . . in contact: Durkheim rejected modern notions of freedom as radical, self-authoring autonomy; rather, he held that all human freedom is *situated* freedom, that is, all autonomy is relative to, or constrained by, socio-linguistic frameworks.

213 *the hypothesis of St Paul:* that is, sudden enlightenment, as in the case of St Paul's seeing 'the light' on his way to Damascus.

223 *In short . . . medical prohibitions:* although this religion-magic distinction is problematic and not absolute, as Durkheim himself suggests at 223 n. 1, it does highlight that which is most distinctive of Durkheim's account of religion, namely, religion's capacity to raise the individual above narrow, utilitarian pursuits.

245 *Alatunja:* the chief of the totemic group.

257 *do ut des:* I give so that you might give.

hypostasized: hypostasize = to construe a conceptual entity as a real, material one. Members of early society, in Durkheim's view, possessed only a vague and inchoate mental notion of themselves as a group until the group was symbolized by a physical object such as a totem.

264 ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ: imitation of god.

269 *certain philosophers:* Durkheim has in mind those empiricists who would deny the reality of social forces because they believe that these forces cannot be tested and measured empirically.

283 *serve no purpose at all:* here Durkheim opposed a strict utilitarian interpretation of ritual. Ritual often resembles art, game, and play; yet this, too, enables a group to recreate and reaffirm itself.

289 *piacular:* Durkheim introduced this concept of rites, *piacular*, from the Latin *piaculum* (a victim, sacrifice, atonement, punishment, crime, or sin). Piacular rites perform the function of expressing community solidarity in the face of such crises as the death of one of its members.

292 *same state:* Victoria, Australia.

295 *But more generally . . . the actors of the rite:* Durkheim was eager to highlight the sociological, not psychological, dimensions of mourning.

298 *minoris resistentiae:* less able to resist.

312 *a recent apologist for faith:* William James (1842–1910), an American philosopher, psychologist, and author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), had argued that the truth of a proposition should be judged by its practical consequences.

But given the fact that . . . the idea that believers have of it: here Durkheim made a fundamental distinction that has informed the discipline of religious studies. The scholar of religion *describes* the 'religious experience' in terms that the believers themselves could recognize; next, however, the scholar may proceed to *explain* that experience in ways that the believers may not recognize or accept.

317 *a natural product of social life*: rejecting the tyranny of the natural–social dichotomy, Durkheim intentionally brought the polarities together in this phrase.

319 *in foro externo*: in the external world.

325 *tradidit mundum hominum disputationi*: it abandoned the world to the disputes of men.

What science disputes . . . of man and the world: throughout his career, Durkheim respected religion yet challenged the notion that religious truth claims be granted a privileged status, free from all unwelcome criticism.

331 *νοῦς*: the ‘mind’ or ‘intellect’ which is informed by the Platonic realm of eternal forms or ideas.

sub specie aeternitatis: in its essential or universal form.

333 *Scientifically elaborated . . . weak minority*: Durkheim, like Wittgenstein, held that the majority of our beliefs and concepts are not the product of Cartesian scrutiny, by which beliefs and concepts are tested and subject to doubt. Rather, most of our beliefs, most of the time, are based on trust, and are received by way of language, tradition, and custom.

341 *the fall*: in some Christian theology, the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden inflicted humanity with an abiding and painful dividedness between matter and spirit, or between the senses and appetites, on the one hand, and reason and morality, on the other.

342 *either to . . . establish*: in Durkheim’s view, the choice had been to view human cognition and moral existence as (1) the product of the individual’s senses and the material substratum of the brain; or as (2) the work of a supernatural force that transforms the individual organism into a reasoning, moral human. Rejecting both options, Durkheim argued that society, in conjunction with materiality, is the force that transforms the individual human organism into a moral, thinking being.

finis naturae: the conclusion or culmination of nature.

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