

## CHAPTER 7

### THE ORIGINS OF THESE BELIEFS (Conclusion)

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

Emile **Durkheim** (2001 [1912]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Trans. Carol Cosman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Book II, Chapter 7 (iii): 'The Genesis of the Notion of the Totemic Principle or *Mana*', pp. 153-182.

#### 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.<sup>1</sup> 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,

<sup>1</sup> 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*.<sup>\*</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 76.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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,<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See Spencer and Gillen, *Northern Tribes*, 33.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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,

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See below, Book III, Ch. 1, s. III.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>†</sup> 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

<sup>†</sup> 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 population<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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. I).

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.<sup>1</sup> To assert that a

<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>1</sup> 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. [. . .]

<sup>1</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, *Les Fonctions mentales*, 79.