6

EMILE DURKHEIM

*E*MILE Durkheim's theoretical orientation, unlike that of many other major sociological thinkers, contains little ambiguity. He was deeply concerned with the impact of the large-scale structures of society, and society itself, on the thoughts and actions of individuals. His work, as interpreted by Talcott Parsons and others, was most influential in shaping structural-functional theory, with its emphasis on social structure and culture. In light of this, our objective in this chapter is to describe Durkheim's theoretical perspective, with particular (but not exclusive) attention to its macrosociological concerns.

The development and use of the concept of a social fact lies at the heart of Durkheim's sociology. We will have a great deal to say about this concept in this chapter, but a brief introduction to it is needed at this point. In modern terms, *social facts* are the social structures and cultural norms and values that are external to, and

coercive of, actors. Thus readers of this text, as students, are constrained by such social structures as the university bureaucracy as well as the norms and values of American society, which place such great importance on getting a college education. Similar social facts constrain people in all areas of social life.

To understand why Durkheim developed the concept of social fact and what it means, we need to examine at least a few aspects of the intellectual context in which he lived.

In Durkheim's (1900/1973:3) view, sociology was born in France in the nineteenth century. He recognized its roots in the ancient philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) and more proximate sources in French philosophers such as Montesquieu and Condorcet. For example, Durkheim noted, "It is Montesquieu who first laid down the fundamental principles of social science" (1893/1960:61). However, in Durkheim's view, Montesquieu (and Condorcet) did not go far enough: "They limited themselves to offering ingenious or novel views on social facts rather than seeking to create an entirely new discipline" (1900/1973:6). In sum, according to W. Watts Miller, Durkheim saw "Montesquieu as a pioneer of social science, freeing himself from earlier conceptions, but in some ways still their captive" (1993:694). Durkheim (1928/1962:142) gave Saint-Simon credit for first formulating the notion of a science of the social world, but Saint-Simon's ideas were seen as scattered and imperfect. Those ideas were, in Durkheim's view, perfected by Comte, "the first to make a coherent and methodical effort to establish the positive science of societies" (1900/1973:10).

Although the term *sociology* had been coined some years earlier by Comte, there was no field of sociology per se in late nineteenth-century France. There were no schools, departments, or even professors of sociology. There were a few thinkers who were dealing with ideas that were in one way or another sociological, but there was as yet no disciplinary "home" for sociology. Indeed, there was strong opposition from existing disciplines to the founding of such a field. The most significant opposition came from psychology and philosophy, two fields that claimed already to cover the domain sought by sociology. The dilemma for Durkheim, given his aspirations for sociology, was how to create for it a separate and identifiable niche.

To separate it from philosophy, Durkheim argued that sociology should be oriented toward empirical research. This seems simple enough, but the situation was complicated by Durkheim's belief that sociology was also threatened by a philosophical school *within* sociology itself. In his view, the two other major figures of the epoch who thought of themselves as sociologists, Comte and Spencer, were far more interested in philosophizing, in abstract theorizing, than they were in studying the social world empirically. If the field were to continue in the direction set by Comte and Spencer, Durkheim felt, it would become nothing more than a branch of philosophy. As a result, he found it necessary to attack both Comte and Spencer (Durkheim, 1895/1964:19–20). He accused both of substituting preconceived ideas of social phenomena for the actual study of the phenomena in the real world. Thus Comte was said to be guilty of assuming theoretically that the social world was evolving in the direction of an increasingly perfect society, rather than

engaging in the hard, rigorous, and basic work of actually studying the changing nature of various societies. Similarly, Spencer was accused of assuming harmony in society rather than studying whether harmony actually existed.

SOCIAL FACTS

In order to help sociology move away from philosophy and to give it a clear and separate identity, in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim (1895/1964) argued that the distinctive subject matter of sociology should be the study of social facts (see Gane, 1988, for a discussion of the major criticisms of this work as well as a defense of it). The concept of social fact has several components, but crucial in separating sociology from philosophy is the idea that *social facts are to be treated as things*. In that they are to be treated as *things*, social facts are to be studied empirically, *not* philosophically.[1] Durkheim believed that ideas can be known introspectively (philosophically), but *things* "cannot be conceived by purely mental activity"; they require for their conception "data from outside the mind" (1895/1964:xliii). This empirical study of social facts as things sets Durkheimian sociology apart from the largely introspective theorizing of Comte and Spencer.

Although treating social facts as things countered the threat from philosophy (at least as far as Durkheim was concerned), it was only part of the answer to the problem of dealing with the threat coming from psychology. Like Durkheimian sociology, psychology was already highly empirical. To differentiate sociology from psychology, Durkheim argued that social facts were *external to*, and *coercive of*, the actor. Sociology was to be the study of social facts, whereas the study of psychological facts was relegated to psychology. To Durkheim, psychological facts were basically inherited phenomena. Although this certainly does not describe psychology today (and was not a very accurate description of the subject matter of psychology even then), it did allow Durkheim to draw a clear differentiation between the two fields. Psychological facts are clearly internal (inherited), and social facts are external and coercive. As we will soon see, this differentiation is not so neat as Durkheim would have liked us to believe. Nevertheless, by defining a social fact as a *thing* that is *external to, and coercive of, the actor*, Durkheim seems to have done a reasonably good job (at least for that historical era) of attaining his objective of separating sociology from both philosophy and psychology. However, it should be noted that to do this, Durkheim took an "extremist" position (Karady, 1983:79–80), especially in limiting sociology to the study of social facts. This position was to limit at least some branches of sociology to the present day. Furthermore, Durkheim seemed to artificially sever sociology from neighboring fields. As Lemert puts it, "Because he defined sociology so exclusively in relation to its own facts, Durkheim cut it off from the other sciences of man" (1994a:91).

We know that a social fact is a thing and that it is external and coercive, but what else is a social fact? Actually, Durkheim differentiated between two broad types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. *Material social facts* are the clearer of the

---

[1] It is worth noting that Durkheim did a lot of what may be described as philosophizing.

two because they are real, material entities, but they are also of lesser significance in Durkheim's work. As Durkheim put it, "The social fact is sometimes materialized so far as to become an element of the external world" (1897/1951:313). Architecture and the law would be two examples of what he meant by material social facts. We will encounter other examples in this chapter.

The bulk of Durkheim's work, and the heart of his sociology, lies in the study of nonmaterial social facts. Durkheim said: "Not all social consciousness achieves . . . externalization and materialization" (1897/1951:315). What sociologists now call *norms* and *values,* or more generally culture (see Alexander, 1988a), are good examples of what Durkheim meant by *nonmaterial social facts.* But this idea creates a problem: How can nonmaterial social facts like norms and values be external to the actor? Where could they be found except in the minds of actors? And if they are in the minds of actors, then are they not internal rather than external?

To clarify this issue, we must refine Durkheim's argument by contending that while material social facts are clearly external and coercive, nonmaterial social facts are not so clear-cut. (For a similar distinction, see Takla and Pope [1985:82].) To at least some extent, they are found in the minds of actors. The best way to conceptualize nonmaterial social facts is to think of them as external to, and coercive of, psychological facts. In this way we can see that both psychological facts and *some* social facts exist within and between consciousness. Durkheim made this clear in a number of places. At one point he said of social facts, "Individual minds, forming groups by mingling and fusing, give birth to a being, *psychological if you will,* but constituting a psychic individuality of a new sort" (Durkheim, 1895/1964:103; italics added). At another point, Durkheim said, "This does not mean that they [nonmaterial social facts] are not also mental after a fashion, since they all consist of ways of thinking or behaving" (1895/1964:xlix). Thus it is best to think of nonmaterial social facts, at least in part, as mental phenomena, but mental phenomena that are external to, and coercive of, another aspect of the mental process—psychological facts. This confounds Durkheim's differentiation between sociology and psychology somewhat, but it does serve to make the differentiation more realistic and as a result more defensible. Sociology *is* concerned with mental phenomena, but they are usually of a different order from the mental concerns of psychology. Durkheim thus was arguing that sociologists are interested in norms and values, whereas psychologists are concerned with such things as human instincts.

Social facts, then, play a central role in the sociology of Emile Durkheim. A useful way of extracting the most important social facts from his work, and for analyzing his thoughts on the relationships among these phenomena, is to begin with Durkheim's efforts to organize them into *levels* of social reality. He began at the level of material social facts, not because it was the most important level to him, but because its elements often take causal priority in his theorizing. They affect nonmaterial social facts, which are the real focus of his work. (Although we will focus here on both types of social facts, we will have some things to say later about Durkheim's thoughts on the more microscopic aspects of social reality.)

The major levels of social reality (Lukes, 1972:9–10) in Durkheim's work can be depicted as follows:

A. Material Social Facts
  1. Society
  2. Structural components of society (for example, church and state)
  3. Morphological components of society (for example, population distribution, channels of communication, and housing arrangements) (Andrews, 1993)
B. Nonmaterial Social Facts
  1. Morality
  2. Collective conscience
  3. Collective representations
  4. Social currents

The levels within the two categories are listed in terms of descending order of generality.

It is his focus on macro-level social facts that is one of the reasons why Durkheim's work played a central role in the development of structural functionalism, which has a similar, macro-level orientation (see Chapter 13, on Parsons). More specifically, drawing on biology and using an organismic analogy (Lehmann, 1993a:15), Durkheim saw society as composed of "organs" (social facts), or social structures, that had a variety of functions for society. Durkheim urged that we distinguish functions, or the ends served by various structures, from the factors that caused them to come into existence. Durkheim was interested in studying both the causes of social structures and the functions they perform, although he wanted to carefully differentiate between these two topics of study.

We can trace the logic of Durkheim's theory in his analysis of the development of the modern world. This is most clearly shown in one of his most important works, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Durkheim, 1893/1964), a work that has been called sociology's first classic (Tiryakian, 1994).

THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN SOCIETY

Durkheim based his analysis in *The Division of Labor in Society* on his conception of two ideal types of society. The more primitive type, characterized by *mechanical solidarity,* has a relatively undifferentiated social structure, with little or no division of labor. The more modern type, characterized by *organic solidarity,* has a much greater and more refined division of labor. To Durkheim the *division of labor in society* is a material social fact that involves the degree to which tasks or responsibilities are specialized. People in primitive societies tend to occupy very general positions in which they perform a wide variety of tasks and handle a large number of responsibilities. In other words, a primitive person tended to be a jack-of-all-trades. In contrast, those who live in more modern societies occupy more specialized positions and have a much narrower range of tasks and responsibilities. For example, being a mother-housewife in primitive societies is a much less

EMILE DURKHEIM: A Biographical Sketch

Emile Durkheim was born on April 15, 1858, in Epinal, France. He was descended from a long line of rabbis and himself studied to be a rabbi, but by the time he was in his teens, he had largely rejected his heritage. From that time on, his lifelong interest in religion was more academic than theological (Mestrovic, 1988). He was dissatisfied not only with his religious training but also with his general education and its emphasis on literary and esthetic matters. He longed for schooling in scientific methods and in the moral principles needed to guide social life. He rejected a traditional academic career in philosophy and sought instead to acquire the scientific training needed to contribute to the moral guidance of society. Although he was interested in scientific sociology, there was no field of sociology at that time, so between 1882 and 1887 he taught philosophy in a number of provincial schools in the Paris area.

His appetite for science was whetted further by a trip to Germany, where he was exposed to the scientific psychology being pioneered by Wilhelm Wundt. In the years immediately after his visit to Germany, Durkheim published a good deal, basing his work, in part, on his experiences there (Jones, 1994). These publications helped him gain a position in the department of philosophy at the University of Bordeaux in 1887. There Durkheim offered the first course in social science in a French university. This was a particularly impressive accomplishment, because only a decade earlier, a furor had erupted in a French university by the mention of Auguste Comte in a student dissertation. Durkheim's main responsibility, however, was teaching courses in education to schoolteachers, and his most important course was in the area of moral education. His goal was to communicate a moral system to the educators, who he hoped would then pass the system on to young people in an effort to help reverse the moral degeneration he saw around him in French society.

The years that followed were characterized by a series of personal successes for Durkheim. In 1893 he published his French doctoral thesis, *The Division of Labor in Society*, as well as his Latin thesis on Montesquieu (W. Miller, 1993). His major methodological statement, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, appeared in 1895, followed (in 1897) by his empirical application of those methods in the study *Suicide*. By 1896 he had become a full professor at Bordeaux. In 1902 he was summoned to the famous French university, the Sorbonne, and in 1906 he was named professor of the science of education, a title that was changed in 1913 to professor of the science of education *and sociology*. The other of his most famous works, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, was published in 1912.

Durkheim is most often thought of today as a political conservative, and his influence within sociology certainly has been a conservative one. But in his time, he was considered a liberal, and this was exemplified by the active public role he played in the defense of Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish army captain whose court-martial for treason was felt by many to be anti-Semitic.

Durkheim was deeply offended by the Dreyfus affair, particularly its anti-Semitism. But Durkheim did not attribute this anti-Semitism to racism among the French people. Characteristically, he saw it as a symptom of the moral sickness confronting French society as a whole. He said:

When society undergoes suffering, it feels the need to find someone whom it can hold responsible for its sickness, on whom it can avenge its misfortunes: and those against whom public opinion already discriminates are naturally designated for this role. These are the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. What confirms me in this interpretation is the way in which the result of Dreyfus's trial was greeted in 1894. There was a surge of joy in the boulevards. People celebrated as a triumph what should have been a cause for public mourning. At least they knew whom to blame for the economic troubles and moral distress in which they lived. The trouble came from the Jews. The charge had been officially proved. By this very fact alone, things already seemed to be getting better and people felt consoled.

(Lukes, 1972:345)

Thus, Durkheim's interest in the Dreyfus affair stemmed from his deep and lifelong interest in morality and the moral crisis confronting modern society.

To Durkheim, the answer to the Dreyfus affair and crises like it lay in ending the moral disorder in society. Because that could not be done quickly or easily, Durkheim suggested more specific actions such as severe repression of those who incite hatred of others and government efforts to show the public how it is being misled. He urged people to "have the courage to proclaim aloud what they think, and to unite together in order to achieve victory in the struggle against public madness" (Lukes, 1972:347).

Durkheim's (1928/1962) interest in socialism is also taken as evidence against the idea that he was a conservative, but his kind of socialism was very different from the kind that interested Marx and his followers. In fact, Durkheim labeled Marxism as a set of "disputable and out-of-date hypotheses" (Lukes, 1972:323). To Durkheim, socialism represented a movement aimed at the moral regeneration of society through scientific morality, and he was not interested in short-term political methods or the economic aspects of socialism. He did not see the proletariat as the salvation of society, and he was greatly opposed to agitation or violence. Socialism for Durkheim was very different from what we usually think of as socialism; it simply represented a system in which the moral principles discovered by scientific sociology were to be applied.

Durkheim, as we will see throughout this book, had a profound influence on the development of sociology, but his influence was not restricted to it. Much of his impact on other fields came through the journal *L'année sociologique*, which he founded in 1898. An intellectual circle arose around the journal with Durkheim at its center. Through it, he and his ideas influenced such fields as anthropology, history, linguistics, and—somewhat ironically, considering his early attacks on the field—psychology.

Durkheim died on November 15, 1917, a celebrated figure in French intellectual circles, but it was not until over twenty years later, with the publication of Talcott Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), that his work became a significant influence on American sociology.

specialized position than it is in a modern society. Laundry services, diaper services, home delivery, and labor-saving devices (dishwashers, microwave ovens, Cuisinarts, and so forth) perform a number of tasks that were formerly the responsibility of the mother-housewife.

The changes in the division of labor have had enormous implications for the structure of society, and some of the more important implications are reflected in the differences between the two types of solidarity—mechanical and organic. In addressing the issue of solidarity, Durkheim was interested in what holds society together. A society characterized by mechanical solidarity is unified because all people are generalists. The bond among people is that they are all engaged in similar

activities and have similar responsibilities. In contrast, a society characterized by organic solidarity is held together by the differences among people, by the fact that they have different tasks and responsibilities. Because people in modern society perform a relatively narrow range of tasks, they need many other people in order to survive. The primitive family headed by father-hunter and mother-food gatherer is practically self-sufficient, but the modern family, in order to make it through the week, needs the grocer, baker, butcher, auto mechanic, teacher, police officer, and so forth. These people, in turn, need the kinds of services that others provide in order to live in the modern world. Modern society, in Durkheim's view, is thus held together by the specialization of people and their need for the services of many others. Furthermore, Durkheim was concerned with the specialization not only of individuals but also of groups, structures, and institutions. One final difference between mechanical and organic solidarity is worth mentioning: Because people in societies characterized by mechanical solidarity are more likely to be similar to one another in terms of what they do, there is a greater likelihood of competition among them. In contrast, in societies with organic solidarity, differentiation allows people to cooperate more and to all be supported by the same resource base.

Thus a society characterized by organic solidarity leads to both more solidarity *and* more individuality than one characterized by mechanical solidarity (Rueschemeyer, 1994). In other words, Durkheim held the view that the social order and individual autonomy are compatible (Muller, 1994).

Dynamic Density

The division of labor was a material social fact to Durkheim because it is the pattern of interaction in the social world. Another, and closely related, material social fact is the major causal factor in Durkheim's theory of the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity—*dynamic density*. This concept refers to the number of people in a society and the amount of interaction that occurs among them. Neither population increase nor an increase in interaction, when taken separately, is a significant factor in societal change. An increase in numbers of people *and* an increase in the interaction among them (which is dynamic density) lead to the change from mechanical to organic solidarity because together they bring about more competition for scarce resources and a more intense struggle for survival among the various parallel and similar components of primitive society. Because individuals, groups, families, tribes, and so forth perform virtually identical functions, they are likely to clash over these functions, especially if resources are scarce. The rise of the division of labor allows people and the social structures they create to complement, rather than conflict with, one another, and this, in turn, makes peaceful coexistence more likely. Furthermore, the increasing division of labor makes for greater efficiency, with the result that resources increase, and more and more people can survive peacefully.

Although Durkheim was interested in explaining how the division of labor and dynamic density lead to different types of social solidarity, he was interested primarily in the impact of these material changes on, and the nature of, nonmaterial social facts in both mechanically and organically solidified societies. However, because of his image of what a *science* of sociology should be, Durkheim felt that it was impossible to study nonmaterial social facts directly. Direct consideration of nonmaterial social facts was, for him, more philosophical than sociological. In order to study nonmaterial social facts scientifically, the sociologist would have to seek and examine material social facts that reflect the nature of, and changes in, nonmaterial social facts. In *The Division of Labor in Society* it is law, and the differences between law in societies with mechanical solidarity and law in societies with organic solidarity, that plays this role.

Law

Durkheim argued that a society with mechanical solidarity is characterized by *repressive law*. Because people are very similar in this type of society, and because they tend to believe very strongly in a common morality, any offense against their shared value system is likely to be of significance to most individuals. Because most people feel the offense and believe deeply in the common morality, an offender is likely to be severely punished for any action that is considered an offense against the collective moral system. The theft of a pig must lead to the cutting off of the offender's hands; blaspheming against God or gods might well result in the removal of one's tongue. Because people are so involved in the moral system, an offense against it is likely to be met with swift, severe punishment.

In contrast, a society with organic solidarity is characterized by *restitutive law*. Instead of being severely punished for even seemingly minor offenses against the collective morality, individuals in this more modern type of society are likely simply to be asked to comply with the law or to repay—make restitution to—those who have been harmed by their actions. Although some repressive law continues to exist in a society with organic solidarity (for example, the death penalty), restitutive law is more characteristic. There is little or no powerful and coercive common morality; the vast majority of people do not react emotionally to a breach of the law. The monitoring of repressive law is largely in the hands of the masses in a society with mechanical solidarity, but the maintenance of restitutive law is primarily the responsibility of specialized agencies (for example, the police and the courts). This is consistent with the increased division of labor in a society with organic solidarity.

Changes in a material social fact like the law are, in Durkheim's theoretical system, merely reflections of changes in the more crucial elements of his sociology—nonmaterial social facts such as morality, collective conscience, collective representations, social currents, and, most questionably from a modern sociological perspective, the group mind. (All these concepts will be discussed in this chapter.)

At the most general and all-inclusive level, Durkheim was a sociologist of morality (Mestrovic, 1988; Turner, 1993). Indeed, Ernest Wallwork (1972:182)

argued that Durkheim's sociology is merely a by-product of his concern with moral issues. That is, Durkheim's interest in the moral problems of his day led him as a sociologist to devote most of his attention to the moral elements of social life. At its most basic level, Durkheim's great concern was with the declining strength of the common morality in the modern world. In Durkheim's view, people were in danger of a "pathological" loosening of moral bonds. These moral bonds were important to Durkheim, for without them the individual would be enslaved by ever-expanding and insatiable passions. People would be impelled by their passions into a mad search for gratification, but each new gratification would lead only to more and more needs. Durkheim held the seemingly paradoxical view that the individual needs morality and external control in order to be free. This is a curious definition of freedom, but it is the position that Durkheim took.

Anomie

Many of the problems that occupied Durkheim stem from his concern with the decline of the common morality. In the concept of *anomie*, Durkheim best manifested his concern with the problems of a weakened common morality (Hilbert, 1986). Individuals are said to be confronted with anomie when they are not faced with sufficient moral constraint, that is, when they do not have a clear concept of what is and what is not proper and acceptable behavior.

The central "pathology" in modern society was, in Durkheim's view, the *anomic division of labor*. By thinking of anomie as a pathology, Durkheim manifested his belief that the problems of the modern world can be "cured." Durkheim believed that the structural division of labor in modern society is a source of cohesion that compensates for the declining strength of the collective morality. However, the thrust of his argument is that the division of labor cannot entirely make up for the loosening of the common morality, with the result that anomie is a pathology associated with the rise of organic solidarity. Individuals can become isolated and be cut adrift in their highly specialized activities. They can more easily cease to feel a common bond with those who work and live around them. But it is important to remember that this is viewed by Durkheim as an abnormal situation, because only in unusual circumstances does the modern division of labor reduce people to isolated and meaningless tasks and positions. The concept of anomie can be found not only in *The Division of Labor* but also in *Suicide* (Durkheim, 1897/1951) as one of the major types of suicide. Anomic suicide occurs because of the decline in collective morality and the lack of sufficient external regulation of the individual to restrain his or her passions.

Collective Conscience

Durkheim attempted to deal with his interest in common morality in various ways and with different concepts. In his early efforts to deal with this issue, Durkheim developed the idea of the *collective conscience*, which he characterized in *The Division of Labor in Society* in the following way:

The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the *collective* or *common conscience.* . . . It is, thus, an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them.

(Durkheim, 1893/1964:79–80)

Several points are worth underscoring in this definition, given our interest in the collective conscience as an example of a nonmaterial social fact. First, it is clear that Durkheim thought of the collective conscience as occurring throughout a given society when he wrote of the "totality" of people's beliefs and sentiments. Second, Durkheim clearly conceived of the collective conscience as being an independent, determinate cultural system. Although he held such views of the collective conscience, Durkheim also wrote of its being "realized" through individual consciousness. (That Durkheim did *not* conceive of the collective conscience as totally independent of individual consciousness will be important when we examine the charge that Durkheim holds a group-mind concept.)

The concept of the collective conscience allows us to return to Durkheim's analysis, in *The Division of Labor*, of material social facts and their relationship to changes in the common morality. The logic of his argument is that the increasing division of labor (brought on by the increasing dynamic density) is causing a transformation (a diminution but not a disappearance) of the collective conscience. The collective conscience is of much less significance in a society with organic solidarity than it is in a society with mechanical solidarity. People in modern society are more likely to be held together by the division of labor and the resulting need for the functions performed by others than they are by a shared and powerful collective conscience. Anthony Giddens (1972; see also Pope and Johnson, 1983) performed a useful service by pointing out that the collective conscience in the two types of society can be differentiated on four dimensions—volume, intensity, rigidity, and content. *Volume* refers to the number of people enveloped by the collective conscience; *intensity* to how deeply the individuals feel about it; *rigidity* to how clearly it is defined; and *content* to the form that the collective conscience takes in the two polar types of society. In a society characterized by mechanical solidarity, the collective conscience covers virtually the entire society and all its members; it is believed in with great intensity (as reflected, for one thing, by the use of repressive sanctions when it is violated); it is extremely rigid; and its content is highly religious in character. In a society with organic solidarity, the collective conscience is much more limited in its domain and in the number of people enveloped by it; it is adhered to with much less intensity (as reflected in the substitution of restitutive for repressive laws); it is not very rigid; and its content is best described by the phrase "moral individualism," or the elevation of the importance of the individual to a moral precept.

Collective Representations

The idea of the collective conscience, while useful to Durkheim, clearly is very broad and amorphous. Durkheim's dissatisfaction with the character of the concept

of the collective conscience led him to abandon it (at least explicitly) progressively in his later work in favor of the much more specific concept of collective representations. *Collective representations* may be seen as specific states, or substrata, of the collective conscience (Lukes, 1972). In contemporary terms, we may think of collective representations as the norms and values of specific collectivities such as the family, occupation, state, and educational and religious institutions. The concept of collective representations can be used both broadly and specifically, but the critical point is that it allowed Durkheim to conceptualize nonmaterial social facts in a narrower way than the all-encompassing notion of the collective conscience. Despite their greater specificity, collective representations are *not* reducible to the level of individual consciousness: "*Representations collectives* result from the substratum of associated individuals . . . but they have *sui generis* characteristics" (Durkheim, cited in Lukes, 1972:7). The Latin term *sui generis* means "unique." When Durkheim used this term to refer to the structure of collective representations, he was saying that their unique character is not reducible to individual consciousness. This places them squarely within the realm of nonmaterial social facts. They transcend the individual because they do not depend on any particular individual for their existence. They are also independent of individuals in the sense that their temporal span is greater than the lifetime of any individual. Collective representations are a central component of Durkheim's system of nonmaterial social facts.

SUICIDE AND SOCIAL CURRENTS

Durkheim offered an even more specific (and more dynamic) and less crystallized concept that is also a nonmaterial social fact—*social currents*. These were defined by Durkheim as nonmaterial social facts "which have the same objectivity and the same ascendancy over the individual" as the social facts discussed above, but "without such crystallized form" (1895/1964:4). He gave as examples "the great movements of enthusiasm, indignation, and pity in a crowd" (Durkheim, 1895/1964:4). Although social currents are less concrete than other social facts, they are nevertheless social facts, as Durkheim made clear when he said, "They come to each one of us from without and can carry us away in spite of ourselves" (1895/1964:4).

Durkheim explicated the idea of social currents in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1964), but he used it as his major explanatory variable in an empirical study that became a model for the development of American empirical research (Selvin, 1958). In fact, the research reported in *Suicide* (1897/1951) can be seen as an effort to use the ideas developed in *The Rules* in an empirical study of a specific social phenomenon—suicide. In *Suicide* he demonstrated that social facts, in particular social currents, are external to, and coercive of, the individual. Durkheim chose to study suicide because it is a relatively concrete and specific phenomenon. There were relatively good data available on suicide, and above all it is generally considered to be one of the most private and personal of acts. Durkheim believed that if he could show that sociology had a role to play in explaining such a seemingly individualistic act as suicide, it would be relatively easy to extend sociology's domain to phenomena that are much more readily seen as open to sociological analysis. Finally, Durkheim chose to study suicide because if the intellectual community could be convinced of his case in the study of this phenomenon, then sociology would have a reasonable chance of gaining recognition in the academic world.

As a sociologist, Durkheim was not concerned with studying why any specific individual committed suicide. That was to be left to the psychologist. Instead, Durkheim was interested in explaining differences in suicide *rates*, that is, he was interested in why one group had a higher rate of suicide than another. Durkheim tended to assume that biological, psychological, and social-psychological factors remain essentially constant from one group to another or from one time period to another. If there is variation in suicide rates from one group to another or from one time period to another, Durkheim assumed that the difference would be due to variations in sociological factors, in particular, social currents.

Committed as he was to empirical research, Durkheim was not content simply to dismiss other possible causes of differences in suicide rates; instead he tested them empirically. He began *Suicide* with a series of alternative ideas about the causes of suicide. Among these are individual psychopathology, alcoholism (Skog, 1991), race, heredity, and climate. Although Durkheim marshaled a wide range of facts to reject each of these as crucial to differences in suicide rates, his clearest argument, and the one that was most consistent with his overall perspective, was on the relevance of racial factors to the differences. One of the reasons that race was rejected is that suicide rates varied among groups *within* the same race. If race were a significant cause of differences in suicide rates, then we would assume that it would have a similar impact on the various subgroups. Another piece of evidence against race as a significant cause of variations in rates is the change in rates for a given race when it moves from one society to another. If race were a relevant social fact, it should have the same effect in different societies. Although Durkheim's argument is not powerful here, and is even weaker on the other factors that he rejected, this does give us a feel for the nature of Durkheim's approach to the problem of empirically dismissing what he considered extraneous factors so that he could get to what he thought of as the most important causal variables.

In addition to rejecting the factors discussed above, Durkheim examined and rejected the imitation theory associated with the early French social psychologist Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904). The theory of imitation argues that people commit suicide (and engage in a wide range of other actions) because they are imitating the actions of others who have committed suicide. This social-psychological approach to sociological thinking is foreign to Durkheim's focus on social facts. As a result, Durkheim took pains to reject it. For example, Durkheim reasoned that if imitation were truly important, we should find that the nations that border on a country with a high suicide rate would themselves have high rates. He looked at the data on the significance of this geographical factor and concluded that no such relationship existed. Durkheim admitted that some individual suicides may be the result of imitation, but it is such a minor factor that it has no significant effect on the overall

suicide rate. In the end, Durkheim rejected imitation as a significant factor because of his view that only one social fact could be the cause of another social fact. Because imitation is a social-psychological variable, it cannot, in his system, serve as a significant cause of differences in social suicide rates. As Durkheim put it, "The social suicide-rate can be explained only sociologically" (1897/1951:299).

To Durkheim, the critical factors in changes in suicide rates were to be found in differences at the level of social facts. Of course, there are two types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. As usual, material social facts occupy the position of causal priority but not of causal primacy. For example, Durkheim looked at the significance of dynamic density for differences in suicide rates but found that its effect is only indirect. But differences in dynamic density (and other material social facts) do have an effect on differences in nonmaterial social facts, and these differences have a direct effect on suicide rates. Durkheim was making two related arguments. On the one hand, he was arguing that different collectivities have different collective consciences and collective representations. These, in turn, produce different social currents, which have differential effects on suicide rates. One way to study suicide is to compare different societies or other types of collectivities. On the other hand, Durkheim was arguing that changes in the collective conscience lead to changes in social currents, which, in turn, lead to changes in suicide rates. This leads to the historical study of changes in suicide rates within a given collectivity. In either case, cross-culturally or historically, the logic of the argument is essentially the same: differences or changes in the collective conscience lead to differences or changes in social currents, and these, in turn, lead to differences or changes in suicide rates. In other words, changes in suicide rates are due to changes in social facts, primarily social currents. Durkheim was quite clear on the crucial role played by social currents in the etiology of suicide:

> Each social group has a collective inclination for the act, quite its own, and the source of all individual inclination rather than their result. It is made up of *currents of egoism, altruism or anomy* running through . . . society. . . . These tendencies of the whole social body, by affecting individuals, cause them to commit suicide.
>
> (Durkheim, 1897/1951:299–300; italics added)

The Four Types of Suicide

Durkheim's theory of suicide, and the structure of his sociological reasoning, can be seen more clearly if we examine each of his four types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic (Bearman, 1991). Durkheim linked each of the types of suicide to the degree of integration into, or regulation by, society. *Integration* refers to the degree to which collective sentiments are shared. Altruistic suicide is associated with a high degree of integration and egoistic suicide with a low degree of integration. *Regulation* refers to the degree of external constraint on people. Fatalistic suicide is associated with high regulation, anomic suicide with low regulation. Whitney Pope (1976:12–13) offered a very useful summary of the four

types of suicide discussed by Durkheim. He did this by interrelating high and low degrees of integration and regulation in the following way:

Integration	Low	→	Egoistic suicide
	High	→	Altruistic suicide
Regulation	Low	→	Anomic suicide
	High	→	Fatalistic suicide

Egoistic Suicide   High rates of *egoistic suicide* are likely to be found in those societies, collectivities, or groups in which the individual is not well integrated into the larger social unit. This lack of integration leads to a sense of meaninglessness among individuals. Societies with a strong collective conscience and the protective, enveloping social currents that flow from it are likely to prevent the widespread occurrence of egoistic suicide by, among other things, providing people with a sense of the broader meaning of their lives. When these social currents are weak, individuals are able rather easily to surmount the collective conscience and do as they wish. In large-scale social units with a weak collective conscience, individuals are left to pursue their private interests in whatever way they wish. Such unrestrained egoism is likely to lead to considerable personal dissatisfaction, because all needs cannot be fulfilled, and those that are fulfilled simply lead to the generation of more and more needs and, ultimately, to dissatisfaction—and, for some, to suicide (Breault, 1986). However, strongly integrated families, religious groups, and polities act as agents of a strong collective conscience and discourage suicide. Here is the way Durkheim puts it in terms of religious groups:

> Religion protects man against the desire for self-destruction. . . . What constitutes religion is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are, the stronger the integration of the religious community, also the *greater its preservative* value.
>
> (Durkheim, 1897/1951:170; italics added)

The disintegration of society produces distinctive social currents, and these are the principal causes of differences in suicide rates. For example, Durkheim talked of societal disintegration leading to "currents of depression and disillusionment" (1897/1951:214). The moral disintegration of society predisposes the individual to commit suicide, but the currents of depression must also be there to produce differences in rates of egoistic suicide. Interestingly, Durkheim was here reaffirming the importance of social forces, even in the case of egoistic suicide, where the individual might be thought to be free of social constraints. Actors are *never* free of the force of the collectivity: "However individualized a man may be, there is always something collective remaining—the very depression and melancholy resulting from this same exaggerated individualism. He effects communion through sadness when he no longer has anything else with which to achieve it" (Durkheim, 1897/1951:214). The case of egoistic suicide indicates that in even the most individualistic, most private of acts, social facts are the key determinant.

phenomena. Such a conception is not susceptible to the group-mind charge, but its defense is complicated, because in order to lay out a separate domain for sociology, Durkheim often made some highly exaggerated claims about social facts. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Durkheim often talked as if social facts were rigidly separated from psychological facts, and such a separation would be supportive of the group-mind argument. However, in other places Durkheim admitted that this was an artificial dichotomy; in other words, nonmaterial social facts are firmly anchored in the mental processes of individuals (1893/1964:350); see also Lukes, 1972:16).

Durkheim put to rest once and for all the group-mind thesis:

> Either the *collective conscience* floats like a void, a kind of indescribable absolute, or else it is connected to the rest of the world by a substratum upon which, consequently, it is dependent. Moreover, what can this substratum be made up of, if it is not the members of society as they are combined socially?
>
> (Durkheim, cited in Giddens, 1972:159)

It seems that Durkheim, outside of some outrageous arguments made to justify a niche for the fledgling sociology, offered an eminently reasonable position on nonmaterial social facts. Durkheim began with an interest in this level, retained it throughout his career, and, if anything, grew even more interested in it in his later years. This increasing concern can best be seen in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* published in 1912.

RELIGION

As we have seen, Durkheim felt the need to focus on material manifestations of nonmaterial social facts (for example, law in *The Division of Labor* and suicide rates in *Suicide*). But in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Durkheim felt comfortable enough to address nonmaterial social facts, in particular religion, more directly.[3] Religion is, in fact, the ultimate nonmaterial social fact, and an examination of it allowed him to shed new light on this entire aspect of his theoretical system. Religion has what Durkheim calls a "dynamogenic" quality; that is, it has the capacity not only to dominate individuals but also to elevate them above their ordinary abilities and capacities (Jones, 1986).

Although the research reported in *The Elementary Forms* is not Durkheim's own, he felt it necessary, given his commitment to empirical science, to embed his thinking on religion in published data. The major sources of his data were studies of a primitive Australian tribe, the Arunta. Durkheim felt it important to study religion within such a primitive setting for several reasons. First, he believed that it is much easier to gain insight into the essential nature of religion in a primitive setting than in more modern society. Religious forms in primitive society could be "shown in all their nudity," and it would require "only the slightest effort to lay them open" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:18). Second, the ideological systems of primitive religions are less well developed than those of modern religions, with the

[3] Alexander (1988a:11) argues that it is this work that forms the basis of renewed contemporary interest in cultural studies. Collins (1988b:108) sees it as his "most important book."

result that there is less obfuscation. As Durkheim put it, "That which is accessory or secondary . . . has not yet come to hide the principal elements. All is reduced to that which is indispensable, to that without which there could be no religion" (1912/1965:18). Third, whereas religion in modern society takes diverse forms, in primitive society there is "intellectual and moral conformity" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:18). As a result, religion can be studied in primitive society in its most pristine form. Finally, although Durkheim studied primitive religion, it was not because of his interest in that religious form per se. Rather, he studied it in order "to lead to an understanding of the religious nature of man, that is to say, to show us an essential and permanent aspect of humanity" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:13). More specifically, Durkheim examined primitive religion to shed light on religion in modern society.

Given the uniform and ubiquitous character of religion in primitive societies, we may equate that religion with the collective conscience. That is, religion in primitive society is an all-encompassing collective morality. But as society develops and grows more specialized, religion comes to occupy an increasingly narrow domain. Instead of being the collective conscience in modern society, religion becomes simply one of a number of collective representations. Although it expresses some collective sentiments, other institutions (for example, law and science) come to express other aspects of the collective morality. Although Durkheim recognized that religion per se comes to occupy an ever narrower domain, he also contended that most, if not all, of the various collective representations of modern society have their origin in the all-encompassing religion of primitive society.

Sacred and Profane

The ultimate question for Durkheim was the source of modern religion. Because specialization and the ideological smoke screen make it impossible to study directly the roots of religion in modern society, Durkheim addressed the issue in the context of primitive society. The question is: Where does primitive (and modern) religion come from? Operating from his basic methodological position that only one social fact can cause another social fact, Durkheim concluded that society is the source of all religion. Society (through individuals) creates religion by defining certain phenomena as sacred and others as profane. Those aspects of social reality that are defined as *sacred*—that is, that are set apart and deemed forbidden—form the essence of religion. The rest are defined as *profane*—the everyday, the commonplace, the utilitarian, the mundane aspects of life. The sacred brings out an attitude of reverence, respect, mystery, awe, and honor. The respect accorded to certain phenomena transforms them from the profane to the sacred.

The differentiation between the sacred and the profane, and the elevation of some aspects of social life to the sacred level, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the development of religion. Three other conditions are needed. First, there must be the development of a set of religious beliefs. These *beliefs* are "the representations which express the nature of sacred things and the relations which they sustain, either with each other or with profane things" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:56). Second, a set of religious *rites* is necessary. These are "the rules of

conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:56). Finally, a religion requires a *church,* or a single overarching moral community. The interrelationships among the sacred, beliefs, rites, and church led Durkheim to the following definition of a religion: "*A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them*" (1912/1965:62).

Totemism

Durkheim's view that society is the source of religion shaped his examination of totemism among the Australian Arunta. *Totemism* is a religious system in which certain things, particularly animals and plants, come to be regarded as sacred and as emblems of the clan. Durkheim viewed totemism as the simplest, most primitive form of religion. It is paralleled by a similarly primitive form of social organization, the *clan.* If Durkheim could have shown that the clan is the source of totemism, he could have demonstrated his argument that society is at the root of religion. Here is the way that Durkheim made this argument:

> A religion so closely connected to a social system surpassing all others in simplicity may well be regarded as the most elementary religion we can possibly know. If we succeed in discovering the origins of the beliefs which we have just analyzed, we shall very probably discover at the same time the causes leading to the rise of the religious sentiment in humanity.
>
> (Durkheim, 1912/1965:195)

Although a clan may have a large number of totems, Durkheim was not inclined to view these as a series of separate, fragmentary beliefs about specific animals or plants. Instead, he tended to view them as an interrelated set of ideas that give the clan a more or less complete representation of the world. The plant or animal is not the source of totemism; it merely represents that source. The totems are the material representations of the immaterial force that is at their base. And that immaterial force is none other than the now familiar collective conscience of society:

> Totemism is the religion, not of such and such animals or men or images, but of an anonymous and impersonal force, found in each of these beings but not to be confounded with any of them. . . . Individuals die, generations pass and are replaced by others; but this force always remains actual, living and the same. It animates the generations of today as it animated those of yesterday and as it will those of tomorrow.
>
> (Durkheim, 1912/1965:217)

Totemism, and more generally religion, is derived from the collective morality and becomes itself an impersonal force. It is not simply a series of mythical animals, plants, personalities, spirits, or gods.

Collective Effervescence

The collective conscience is the source of religion, but where does the collective conscience itself come from? In Durkheim's view, it comes from only one source—society. In the primitive case examined by Durkheim, this meant that the clan is the ultimate source of religion. Durkheim was quite explicit on this point: "Religious force is nothing other than the collective and anonymous force of the clan" (1912/1965:253). Although we may agree that the clan is the source of totemism, the question remains: How does the clan create totemism? The answer lies in a central but little discussed component of Durkheim's conceptual arsenal—*collective effervescence.*

The notion of collective effervescence is not well spelled out in any of Durkheim's works, including *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* He seemed to have in mind, in a general sense, the great moments in history when a collectivity is able to achieve a new and heightened level of collective exaltation that in turn can lead to great changes in the structure of society. The Reformation and the Renaissance would be examples of historical periods when collective effervescence had a marked effect on the structure of society. Durkheim also argued that it is out of collective effervescence that religion arises: "It is in the midst of these effervescent social environments and out of this effervescence itself that the religious idea seems to be born" (1912/1965:250). During periods of collective effervescence, the clan members create totemism.

In sum, totemism is the symbolic representation of the collective conscience, and the collective conscience, in turn, is derived from society. Therefore, society is the source of the collective conscience, religion, the concept of God, and ultimately everything that is sacred (as opposed to profane). In a very real sense, then, we can argue that the sacred (and ultimately God, as something sacred) and society are one and the same. This is fairly clear-cut in primitive society. It remains true today, even though the relationship is greatly obscured by the complexities of modern society.

SOCIAL REFORMISM

We have now worked our way through most of Durkheim's most important types of nonmaterial social facts—morality, collective conscience, collective representations, social currents, and religion. These concepts were at the center of Durkheim's thinking from the beginning of his career. Earlier we touched on the significance of material social facts in Durkheim's work, but it is clear that they were not nearly as important to him as nonmaterial social facts. They occupy the role of either causal priorities to nonmaterial social facts (for example, dynamic density in *The Division of Labor*) or objective indices of nonmaterial social facts (for example, law in *The Division of Labor*). There is still another significant part that material social facts play in Durkheim's system—as structural solutions to the moral problems of our times.

Durkheim was a social reformer who saw problems in modern society as temporary aberrations and not as inherent difficulties (Fenton, 1984:45). In taking this position, he stood in opposition to both the conservatives and the radicals of his day. Conservatives like Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre saw no hope in modern society and sought instead a return to a more primitive type of existence. Radicals like the Marxists of Durkheim's time agreed that the world could not be

reformed, but they hoped that a revolution would bring into existence socialism and communism. In contrast, Durkheim, following up on his analogy between social and biological processes, argued that the problems of the day were "pathologies" that could be "cured" by the "social physician" who recognized the moral nature of the modern world's problems and undertook structural reforms to alleviate them. For example, in *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim talked of three abnormal, or pathological, forms of the division of labor. These are caused by temporary or transient forces and are not inherent in modern society. The pathologies Durkheim described are anomie, inequality in the structure of the work world (the wrong people in the wrong positions), and inadequate organization (incoherence) in the work world.

Durkheim was a reformist, not a radical or a revolutionary. Thus, when he devoted a book to socialism, it was to study it as a social fact, not to outline a revolutionary doctrine (Durkheim, 1928/1962). He was quite explicit about his political position in discussing his interest in the study of social facts:

> Our reasoning is not at all revolutionary. We are even, in a sense, essentially conservative, since we deal with social facts as such, recognize their flexibility, but conceive them as deterministic rather than arbitrary. How much more dangerous is the doctrine which sees in social phenomena only the results of unrestrained manipulation, which can in an instant, by a simple dialectical artifice, be completely upset.
>
> (Durkheim, 1895/1964:xxxviii–xxxix)[4]

More specific to a communist revolution, Durkheim said:

> Let us suppose that by a miracle the whole system of property is entirely transformed overnight and that on the collectivist formula the means of production are taken out of the hands of the individual and made over absolutely to collective ownership. All the problems around us that we are debating today will still persist in their entirety.
>
> (Durkheim, 1957:30)

Occupational Associations

The major reform that Durkheim proposed for social pathologies was the development of occupational associations. In looking at the organizations of his time, Durkheim did not believe that there was a basic conflict of interest among the various types of people found within them—owners, managers, and workers. In this, of course, he was taking a position diametrically opposed to that of Marx, who saw an essential conflict of interest between the owners and the workers. Durkheim believed that such a clash was occurring at that time because the various people involved lacked a common morality and that the lack of morality was traceable to the lack of an integrative structure. He suggested that the structure that was needed to provide this integrative morality was the occupational association, which would encompass "all the agents of the same industry united

[4] Not only was Durkheim treating us to his own conservative politics, but he also was attacking the revolutionary theories of Marx and Marx's followers.

and organized into a single group" (Durkheim, 1893/1964:5). Such an organization was deemed to be different from, and superior to, such organizations as labor unions and employer associations, which in Durkheim's view served only to intensify the differences between owners, managers, and workers. Involved in a common organization, people in these categories would recognize their common interests as well as their common need for an integrative moral system. That moral system, with its derived rules and laws, would serve to counteract the tendency toward atomization in modern society as well as help stop the decline in significance of collective morality.

Cult of the Individual

In the end, structural reform was subordinated in Durkheim's mind to changes in the collective morality. He believed that the essential problems of modern society were moral in nature and that the only real solution lay in reinforcing the strength of the collective morality. Although Durkheim recognized that there was no returning to the powerful collective conscience of societies characterized by mechanical solidarity, he felt that a modern, although weakened, version of it was emerging. He labeled the modern form of the collective conscience the *cult of the individual* (Chriss, 1993; Tole, 1993). This was a curious concept for Durkheim, because it seems to fuse the seemingly antagonistic forces of morality and individualism. Embedded in this concept is the idea that individualism is becoming the moral system of modern society:

> For Durkheim, this was an ethic of individualism that grounded human freedom in communal solidarity, an ethic which affirmed the rights of the individual in relation to the well-being of all citizens rather than to individual achievement in the pursuit of self-interest. It was an ethic that represented the true expression of the ideals of individualism, and for Durkheim was the only solution to the problem of how the individual could remain 'more solidary while becoming more autonomous.'
>
> (Tole, 1993:26)

Elevated to the status of a moral system, individualism was acceptable to Durkheim. What he continued to oppose was egoism, because this is individualism without a collective base; it is rampant hedonism. Presumably, by following a morality of individualism, the actor would be able to keep his or her passions in check. Ironically, paradoxically, and ultimately a bit unsatisfactorily, Durkheim proposed the cult of the individual as the solution to modern egoism. It appears that Durkheim came to recognize that there was no stemming the tide of individualism in modern society, so rather than continue to fight it, he made the best of a bad situation (judged by his moral principles) by elevating at least some forms of individualism to the level of a moral system. One of the many problems with this view is the virtual impossibility of differentiating in real life between actions based on moral individualism and those based on egoism. However, Durkheim might argue that it is possible to distinguish between people guided by a morality which requires them to give due recognition to the inherent dignity, rights, and freedom

of the individual and people who are simply acting to promote their own egotistically defined self-interest.

THE ACTOR IN DURKHEIM'S THOUGHT

The bulk of this chapter is devoted to Durkheim's concern with social facts. However, Durkheim had insights into the microscopic aspects of social reality, and we will deal with some of them here. The reader should keep in mind that much of what Durkheim offered at this level was derived from his overriding interest in social facts and cannot really be separated from it.

Durkheim's often overly zealous arguments for sociology and against psychology have led many to argue that he had little to offer on the human actor and the nature of action (Lukes, 1972:228). Many contend that Durkheim had little to say about individual consciousness (Nisbet, 1974:32; Pope, 1975:368, 374), because he did not feel that it was amenable to scientific analysis. As Robert Nisbet put it:

> We cannot go to internal states of mind.... Consciousness, though real enough, will not serve the austere tests of scientific method. If we are to study mere phenomena in an objective fashion, we must substitute for the internal fact of consciousness an external index which symbolizes it and study the former in light of the latter.
>
> (Nisbet, 1974:52, see also Pope, 1976:10–11)

Although there is some truth to this claim, it grossly exaggerates the reality to be found in Durkheim's work. Although Durkheim may have made statements against the study of consciousness, he did deal with it in a variety of places and ways. Nevertheless, it is true that he treated the actor, and the actor's mental processes, as secondary factors, or more commonly as dependent variables to be explained by the independent and focal factors—social facts.

Durkheim was critical of dealing with consciousness, but he demonstrated his awareness of the significance of mental processes and even integrated them directly into his work. Although he made a similar point in several places (for example, Durkheim, 1897/1951:315), the following is Durkheim's clearest statement of his interest in mental processes:

> In general, we hold that sociology has not completely achieved its task so long as it has not penetrated into the mind . . . of the individual in order to relate the institutions it seeks to explain to their psychological conditions. . . . Man is for us less a point of departure than a point of arrival.
>
> (Durkheim, cited in Lukes, 1972:498–499)

It appears that Durkheim focused on "external" facts—suicide rates, laws, and so forth—because they are open to scientific analysis, but he did not deem such a macroscopic focus sufficient in itself. The ultimate goal was to integrate an understanding of mental processes into his theoretical system. This is manifest, for example, in his work on suicide, in which social causes are linked to subjective states. Even though he never quite achieved an adequate integration, he did address the issue of consciousness in several different ways.

Assumptions about Human Nature

We may gain insight into Durkheim's views on consciousness by examining his assumptions about human nature. Despite having made a number of crucial assumptions about human nature, Durkheim denied that he had done so. He argued that he did *not* begin by postulating a certain conception of human nature in order to deduce a sociology from it. Instead, he said that it was from sociology that he sought an increasing understanding of human nature. However, Durkheim may have been less than honest with us, and perhaps even with himself.

Durkheim did in fact identify a number of components of human nature. At a basic level, he accepted the existence of biological drives. But of greater significance to sociology, he acknowledged the importance of social feelings, including "love, affection, sympathetic concern, and associated phenomena" (Wallwork, 1972:28). Durkheim viewed people as naturally social, for "if men were not naturally inclined toward their fellows, the whole fabric of society, its customs and institutions, would never arise" (Wallwork, 1972:29–30). However, these sentiments did not play an active role in his sociology, and he therefore relegated them to psychology. Another of Durkheim's basic assumptions, which received only scant attention from him, is the idea that people are able to think: "Men differ from animals, Durkheim contends, precisely because images and ideas intervene between innate inclinations and behavior" (Wallwork, 1972:30).

Whereas the preceding are of marginal significance to his work, another of Durkheim's assumptions about human nature—one that we have already encountered—may be viewed as the basis of his entire sociology. That assumption is that people are endowed with a variety of egoistic drives that, if unbridled, constitute a threat to themselves as well as to society. To Durkheim, people possess an array of passions. If these passions are unrestrained, they multiply to the point where the individual is enslaved by them. This led Durkheim to his curious (on the surface) definition of *freedom* as external control over passions. People are free when their passions are constrained by external forces, and the most general and most important of these forces is the common morality. It can be argued that Durkheim's entire theoretical edifice, especially his emphasis on collective morality, was erected on this basic assumption about people's passions. As Durkheim put it, "Passion individualizes, yet it also enslaves. Our sensations are essentially individual; yet we are more personal the more we are freed from our senses and able to think and act with concepts" (1912/1965:307–308). This same issue is manifest in the differentiation Durkheim made between body and soul and the eternal conflict between them (1914/1973). The body represents the passions; the soul stands for civilization's common morality. "They mutually contradict and deny each other" (Durkheim, 1914/1973:152). Clearly, Durkheim wished this conflict to be resolved in the direction of the soul rather than of the body: "It is civilization that has made man what he is; it is what distinguishes him from the animal: man is man only because he is civilized" (1914/1973:149).

For Durkheim, freedom came from without rather than from within. This requires a collective conscience to constrain the passions. "Morality begins with disinterest, with attachment to something other than ourselves" (Durkheim, 1914/1973:151).

But freedom, or autonomy, has another sense in Durkheim's work. That is, freedom is also derived from the internalization of a common morality that emphasizes the significance and independence of the individual (Lukes, 1972:115, 131). However, in both senses freedom is a characteristic of society, not of individuals. Here, as elsewhere, we see the degree to which Durkheim emphasized nonmaterial social facts (in this case "moral individualism") over mental processes.

We can also include *individual representations* within Durkheim's assumptions about human nature. Whereas collective representations are created by the interaction of people, individual representations are formed by the interaction of brain cells. Individual representations were relegated to psychology, as were many other aspects of Durkheim's thoughts on consciousness. This is the portion of the mental process that Durkheim was unwilling to explore, and it is on this that he is most vulnerable to attack. George Homans (1969), for example, argued that Durkheim exhibited a very limited conception of psychology by confining it to the study of instincts. The psychology of today goes far beyond the study of instincts and encompasses a number of social phenomena that Durkheim would have seen as part of sociology. Homans concluded that "sociology is surely not a corollary of the kind of psychology Durkheim had in mind" (1969:18). However, it is much harder, if not impossible, in Homans's view, to clearly separate sociology from the psychology of today.

Running through much of this discussion (body and soul; individual and collective representations) is a sense of the duality of human nature, of *homo duplex*. As Durkheim puts it, "our inner life has something that is like a double center of gravity. On the one hand is our individuality—and, more particularly, our body in which it is based; on the other is everything in us that expresses something other than ourselves" (1914/1973:152). Not only do these dual states of consciousness exist within us, but they are mutually contradictory:

It is not without reason, therefore, that man feels himself to be double: he actually is double. There are in him two classes of states of consciousness that differ from each other in origin and nature, and in the ends toward which they aim. One class merely expresses our organisms and the objects to which they are most directly related. Strictly individual, the states of consciousness of this class connect us only with ourselves, and we can no more detach them from us than we can detach ourselves from our bodies. The states of consciousness of the other class, on the contrary, come to us from society; they transfer society into us and connect us with something that surpasses us. Being collective, they are impersonal; they turn us toward ends that we hold in common with other men; it is through them and them alone that we can communicate with others. It is, therefore, quite true that we are made up of two parts, and are like two beings, which, although they are closely associated, are composed of very different elements and orient us in opposite directions.

(Durkheim, 1914/1973:161–162)

Thus, we are led to live a double existence. In addition to the perpetual tension that this creates, Durkheim was most concerned with the need to strengthen the collective aspects of ourselves in order to better control the excesses of our individual passions.

Socialization and Moral Education

Given his views on innate human passions and the need to constrain them by common morality, it should come as no surprise that Durkheim was very much interested in the *internalization* of social morals through education and, more generally, through socialization. Social morality exists primarily at the cultural level, but it is also internalized by the individual. In Durkheim's words, common morality "penetrates us" and "forms part of us" (Lukes, 1972:131).

Durkheim was not concerned primarily with the issue of internalization but rather with how it bore upon the cultural and structural problems of his day (Pope, 1976:195). He did not specify how the common morality was internalized. He was much more concerned with what seemed to be a lessening of the power of this internalization of morality in contemporary society. The essence of the matter for Durkheim was the decline in the degree to which social facts exercise constraint upon consciousness. As Robert Nisbet put it, "Durkheim would never really abandon the idea that the Western society he knew was undergoing a major crisis and that the crisis consisted at bottom in a pathological loosening of moral authority upon the lives of individuals" (1974:192). Durkheim put it this way: "History records no crisis as serious as that in which European societies have been involved for more than a century. Collective discipline in its traditional form has lost its authority" (1973:101). Durkheim's interest in anomie in both *Suicide* and *The Division of Labor in Society* can be seen as a manifestation of this concern.

Much of Durkheim's work on education, and socialization in general, can be seen in light of this concern for moral decay and possible reforms to halt the spread of it. *Education* and *socialization* were defined by Durkheim as the processes by which the individual learns the ways of a given group or society—acquires the physical, intellectual, and, most important to Durkheim, moral tools needed to function in society (Durkheim, 1922/1956:71). Moral education has three important aspects (Wallwork, 1972).

First, its goal is to provide individuals with the *discipline* they need to restrain the passions that threaten to engulf them:

The totality of moral regulations really forms about each person an imaginary wall, at the foot of which a multitude of human passions simply die without being able to go further. For the same reason—that they are contained—it becomes possible to satisfy them. But if at any point this barrier weakens, human forces—until now restrained—pour tumultuously through the open breach; once loosed, they find no limits where they can or must stop.

(Durkheim, 1973:42)

More specifically, on the education of children, Durkheim says that only through discipline "and by means of it alone are we able to teach the child to rein in his desires, to set limits to his appetites of all kinds, to limit, and through limitation, to define the goals of his activity. This limitation is the condition of happiness and of moral health" (1973:43–44).

Second, individuals are provided with a sense of autonomy, but it is a characteristically atypical kind of autonomy in which "the child understands the

reasons why the rules prescribing certain forms of behavior should be 'freely desired,' that is to say, 'willingly accepted' by virtue of 'enlightened assent' " (Wallwork, 1972:127).

Finally, the process of socialization aims at developing a sense of devotion to society and to its moral system. These aspects of moral education are efforts to combat the pathological loosening of the grip of collective morality on the individual in modern society.

At the most general level, Durkheim was concerned with the way in which collective morality constrains people both externally and internally. In one sense, nonmaterial social facts stand outside people and shape their thoughts (and actions). Of course, social facts cannot act on their own but only through their agents. Of greater importance, however, is the degree to which individuals constrain themselves by internalizing social morality. As Durkheim put it, "The collective force is not entirely outside of us; it does not act upon us wholly from without; but rather, since society cannot exist except in and through individual consciousness, this force must also penetrate us and organize itself within us" (1912/1965:240). In addition to making clear the process of internalization, the preceding quotation also shows once again that Durkheim rejected the idea of a group mind, for he stated that collective forces can exist only in individual consciousness. Ernest Wallwork did an excellent job of clarifying the importance of the internalization of morality in Durkheim's system:

A normal mind, Durkheim observes, cannot consider moral maxims without considering them as obligatory. Moral rules have an "imperative character"; they "exercise a sort of ascendancy over the will which feels constrained to conform to them." This constraint is not to be confused with physical force or compulsion; the will is not forced to conform to the norms it entertains even if these norms are enforced by public opinion. Moral "constraint does not consist in an exterior and mechanical pressure; it has a more intimate and psychological character." But this intimate, psychological sense of obligation is, nevertheless, none other than the authority of public opinion which penetrates, like the air we breathe, into the deepest recesses of our being.

(Wallwork, 1972:38)

Durkheim offered a specific example of internal constraint in his study on religion:

If [an individual] acts in a certain way towards the totemic beings, it is not only because the forces resident in them are physically redoubtable, but because he feels himself morally obliged to act thus; he has the feeling that he is obeying an imperative, that he is fulfilling a duty.

(Durkheim, 1912/1965:218)

All these concerns can be seen in the context of the constraining effect of collective morality on the actor. Whether the constraint is external or internal, it still comes down to collective morality controlling the thoughts and actions of individuals.

Durkheim's limited thoughts on consciousness led many people to assume that his ideal actor is one who is almost wholly controlled from without—a total conformist. Although there is much to recommend this view—and some modern sociologists in following Durkheim seem to have adopted this position—Durkheim himself did not subscribe to such an extreme view of the actor: "Conformity must not be pushed to the point where it completely subjugates the intellect. Thus it does not follow from a belief in the need for discipline that it must be blind and slavish" (cited in Giddens, 1972:113). Durkheim does see a role for individuals: they are all not simply mirror images of collective ideas; there is individuality. Each of us has unique temperaments, habits, and so forth. "Each of us puts his own mark on them [collective ideas]; and this accounts for the fact that each person has his own particular way of thinking . . . about the rules of common morality" (Durkheim, 1914/1973:161; see also Durkheim 1913–14/1983:91–92). Although Durkheim left open the possibility of individuality, the thrust of his work is in the direction of outlining external constraints on actors and, furthermore, the desirability of such constraint.

Dependent Variables

In Durkheim's works, consciousness most often occupies the position of a dependent variable, determined by various material and especially nonmaterial social facts.

Durkheim viewed sociologically relevant subjective states as the product of social causes. They "are like prolongations . . . inside individuals" . . . of the social causes on which they depend. They may enter sociological explanations as effects, but never as causes. Appeal to subjective states as causal agents, according to Durkheim, threatened the legitimacy of sociology's claim to scientific status by reducing it to psychology.

(Pope, Cohen, and Hazelrigg, 1975:419)

Although we will discuss several such dependent variables, it should be made clear that Durkheim usually dealt with them in only a vague and cursory way. In *Suicide*, for example, Durkheim was quite uncertain about how social currents affect individual consciousness and how changed consciousness, in turn, leads to a heightened likelihood of suicide (Pope, 1976:191). The same criticism applies to every other treatment by Durkheim of consciousness.

In *The Division of Labor*, consciousness was dealt with indirectly, but it is clear that it is a dependent variable. That is, the sense of the argument is that changes at the cultural and societal levels lead to changes in the processes of individual consciousness. In a society with mechanical solidarity, individual consciousness is limited and highly constrained by a powerful collective conscience. In a society with organic solidarity, individual potentials expand, as does individual freedom. But again, although this sense of consciousness as a dependent variable is there, it was left largely implicit by Durkheim. In *Suicide*, however, the status of consciousness as a dependent variable is much clearer. Schematically, the main independent variable is collective morality, and the ultimate dependent variable is suicide rate, but intervening is another set of dependent variables that can only be mental states. Steven Lukes, in the following statement about "weak points" in the individual, implied the mental level: "The

currents impinge from the outside on suicide-prone individuals at their 'weak points' " (1972:214).

Lukes (1972:216–217) went further on this issue and argued that there is a social-psychological theory beneath the "aggressively sociologistic language" found in *Suicide*. One part of that theory is the belief that individuals need to be attached to social goals. Another aspect is that individuals cannot become so committed to such goals that they lose all personal autonomy. Finally, as we have discussed before, there was Durkheim's belief that individuals possess passions and that they can be contented and free only if these passions are restrained from without.

We find in *Suicide* specific conscious states associated with each of the three main types of suicide:

> These subjective states, themselves effects of given social conditions, impel the individual to suicide. . . . The egoistic suicide is characterized by a general depression in the form either of melancholic languor or Epicurean indifference. . . . Anomic suicide is accompanied by anger, disappointment, irritation, and exasperated weariness . . . while the altruistic suicide may experience a calm feeling of duty, the mystic's enthusiasm, or peaceful courage.
>
> (Pope, 1976:197)

Durkheim perceived well-defined states of consciousness accompanying each form of suicide. It is clear that these were peripheral interests for him, as he maintained a consistently large-scale focus. Even such an ardent supporter as Nisbet wished that Durkheim had given more attention to individual consciousness: "Admittedly, one might wish that Durkheim had given more attention to the specific mechanisms by which collective representations in society are translated, in distinctly human, often creative ways, into the individual representations that reflect man's relationship to society" (1974:115). Lukes made the same point: "[Durkheim's] exclusive concentration on the society end of the schema, on the impact of social conditions on individuals rather than the way individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to social conditions, led him to leave inexplicit and unexamined the social-psychological assumptions on which his theories rested" (1972:35).

Mental Categories   We can find a specific example of this tendency to accord priority to the level of society in Durkheim and Marcel Mauss's[5] work on the impact of the structure of society on the form of individual thought. Basically, Durkheim (and Mauss) argued that the form society takes affects the form that thought patterns take. Contesting those who believe that mental categories shape the social world, they believed that the social world shapes mental categories: "Far from it being the case . . . that the social relations of men are based on logical relations between things, in reality it is the former which have provided the prototype for the latter" (Durkheim and Mauss, 1903/1963:82). Although specific large-scale structures (for

[5] Marcel Mauss, Durkheim's nephew and a scholar of some note, coauthored the material on mental categories with Durkheim.

example, family structure and economic and political systems) play a role in shaping logical categories, Durkheim and Mauss devoted most of their attention to the effect of society as a whole:

> Society was not simply a model which classificatory thought followed; it was its own divisions which served as divisions for the system of classification. The first logical categories were social categories; the first classes of things were classes of men. . . . It was because men were grouped, and thought of themselves in the form of groups, that in their ideas they grouped other things, and in the beginning the two modes of grouping were merged to the point of being indistinct.
>
> (Durkheim and Mauss, 1903/1963:82–83)

Durkheim's emphasis on large-scale phenomena is well illustrated by this discussion of the impact of society on logical categories. However, Durkheim did not analyze the corresponding process—the way in which the operation of mental categories, in turn, shapes the structures of society.

To create a more adequate sociology, Durkheim had to do more with consciousness than treat it as an unexplored dependent variable. An almost total focus on large-scale phenomena leaves out important elements of an adequate sociological model. Lukes made some telling points in his discussion of *Suicide*. He argued, quite rightly, that an adequate explanation of suicide cannot stop with an examination of social currents. In his view, "Explaining suicide—and explaining suicide rates—*must* involve explaining why people commit it" (Lukes, 1972:221; italics added). But Durkheim was wrong in assuming that consciousness is not open to scientific inquiry and explanation. Such inquiry can and must be undertaken if we are to go beyond partial theories of social life. Nothing is solved by simply acknowledging the existence of consciousness and refusing to examine it. Durkheim's commitment to a narrow view of science led him astray, as did his tendency toward making radically sociologistic statements that rule out recourse to consciousness:

> He need only have claimed that "social" facts cannot be wholly explained in terms of "individual" facts; instead he claimed that they can only be explained in terms of social facts. . . . It would have been enough to have claimed that no social phenomenon, indeed few human activities, can either be identified or satisfactorily explained without reference, explicit or implicit, to social factors.
>
> (Lukes, 1972:20)

Durkheim also failed to give consciousness an active role in the social process. People are in general controlled by social forces in his system; they do not actively control those systems. Thus, Wallwork contended that "the principal weakness . . . is Durkheim's failure to consider *active* moral judgment" (1972:65; italics added). Durkheim gave too little independence to actors (Pope and Cohen, 1978:1364). Actors can reject some, most, or perhaps even all of the moral principles to which they are exposed. When Durkheim did talk of autonomy, it was in terms of the acceptance of moral norms of autonomy. Individuals seem capable of accepting moral constraint and of controlling themselves only through the internalization of

such norms. But as Wallwork pointed out, autonomy has a much more active component: "Autonomy also involves willful exploration, spontaneous initiative, competent mastery, and creative self-actualization. . . . The child must also be encouraged to exercise his own will, initiative, and creativity" (1972:148).

Indeed, research into cognitive processes, in part done by Jean Piaget, who was working in the Durkheimian tradition, indicates that individual creativity is an important component of social life. In summarizing the work of Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg (who did research on the cognitive elements in moral development), and others, Wallwork said:

> In addition to cultural conditioning, the cognitive activity of the subject is necessary to constitute the experience. Piaget and Kohlberg conclude from their studies that the distinctive phenomenological character of moral experience is always as much a product of the cognitive construction of the subject as it is an accommodation to cultural conditioning by the subject.
>
> (Wallwork, 1972:67)

In other words, a more complete sociology requires a more creative actor and deeper insight into the creative processes.

We have seen that, contrary to the view of many, Durkheim did have a variety of things to say about mental processes. However, the peripheral character of mental processes in his theoretical system makes his insights vague and amorphous. More damning is the fact that the thrust of his work leads to a passive image of the actor, although an active actor is, in this author's view, an essential component of a fully adequate sociological theory.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION AND INTERACTION

Durkheim was weakest in his work on individual action and interaction. Implied in his system are various changes at this level resulting from changes at the level of large-scale social phenomena, but they are not detailed. For example, it seems clear that the nature of action and interaction is quite different in societies with mechanical rather than organic solidarity. The individual in a society with mechanical solidarity is likely to be enraged at a violation of the collective conscience and to act quickly and aggressively toward the violator. In contrast, an individual in a society with organic solidarity is more likely to take a more measured approach, such as calling the police or suing in the courts.[6] Similarly, in *Suicide* the assumption behind the study of changes in suicide rates is that the nature of individual action and interaction changes as a result of alterations in social currents. Suicide rates are used as cumulative measures of changes at the individual level, but the nature of these changes is not explored, at least not in any detail. Similar points could be made about Durkheim's other works, but the critical point is that individual action and interaction are largely unanalyzed in Durkheim's work.

[6] Although in some cases (for example, an assault on one's baby), people in both types of society are likely to react violently. Thus, to some degree, differences between the two societies are dependent on the nature of the crime.

EARLY AND LATE DURKHEIMIAN THEORY

There has been growing awareness in recent years of differences between Durkheim's early thinking (in, for example, *The Division of Labor*) and his later thinking as represented in the preceding discussion of his work on religion. Alexander describes the early work as having an "emphasis on external constraints and 'coercive social facts' on the one hand, and with positivistic, often quantitative methods on the other" (1988c:2). In other words, his early work tended to be highly structural and scientistic. In contrast, in his later work Durkheim tended to focus more on culture than on structure. His interest in religion in general—and more specifically in the distinction between the sacred and the profane, totemism, collective effervescence, symbols, and rituals—can be included under the heading of culture. It was the early Durkheimian perspective that tended to influence sociological theory (especially structural functionalism) first, but in recent years it is the later work that has grown in importance (Alexander, 1988a), especially with the rise of the sociology of culture and of cultural studies outside of sociology.

Part of this later work is the previously discussed work by Durkheim and Mauss (1903/1963) on mental categories. It is interesting to note that this work was influential in the development of a line of French social theory that has run through structuralism to poststructuralism to postmodernism (see Chapter 2). These theories, especially poststructuralism and postmodernism, represent a critique of mainstream sociological theory and pose a profound threat to that theory. Thus, interestingly, while early Durkheimian theory helped spawn mainstream sociological theory, his later work helped create theoretical developments that threaten that mainstream. As Lemert says, Durkheim's early work "began an intellectual labor that, in addition to producing sociology itself, gave rise in due course to another body of thought and moral concern that aims today, rightly or wrongly, to rethink the world Durkheim and his sociology helped invent" (1994a:92).

SUMMARY

Emile Durkheim offered a more coherent theory than any of the other classical sociological theorists. He articulated a rather clear theoretical orientation and used it in a variety of specific works. Supporters would say that the clarity of Durkheim's thinking stems from this coherence, whereas detractors might contend that the clarity is the result of the comparative simplicity of his theory. Whatever the case, it is certainly easier to convey the essence of Durkheim's thinking than that of the other classical theorists.

The heart of Durkheim's theory lies in his concept of social fact. Durkheim differentiated between two basic types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. Although they often occupied a place of causal priority in his theorizing, material social facts (for example, division of labor, dynamic density, and law) were not the most important large-scale forces in Durkheim's theoretical system. The most important focus for Durkheim was on nonmaterial social facts. He dealt with a number of them, including collective conscience, collective representations, and social currents.

Durkheim's study of suicide is a good illustration of the significance of non-material social facts in his work. In his basic causal model, changes in nonmaterial social facts ultimately cause differences in suicide rates. Durkheim differentiated among four types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic—and showed how each is affected by different changes in social currents. The study of suicide was taken by Durkheim and his supporters as evidence that sociology has a legitimate place in the social sciences. After all, it was argued, if sociology could explain so individualistic an act as suicide, then it certainly could be used to explain other, less individual aspects of social life.

Given his focus on nonmaterial social facts and some unfortunate statements made in an effort to define a distinctive domain for sociology, Durkheim is sometimes accused of having a metaphysical, "group-mind" orientation. Despite some seemingly indefensible statements, Durkheim did not believe in a group mind and, in fact, had a very modern conception of culture.

In his later work, Durkheim focused on another aspect of culture, religion. In his analysis of primitive religion, Durkheim sought to show the roots of religion in the social structure of society. It is society that defines certain things as sacred and others as profane. Durkheim demonstrated the social sources of religion in his analysis of primitive totemism and its roots in the social structure of the clan. Furthermore, totemism was seen as a specific form of the collective conscience as manifested in a primitive society. Its source, as well as the source of all collective products, lies in the process of collective effervescence. In the end, Durkheim argued that religion and society are one and the same, two manifestations of the same general process.

Because he identified society with God, and because he deified society, Durkheim did not urge social revolution. Instead, he should be seen as a social reformer interested in improving the functioning of society. Whereas Marx saw irreconcilable differences between capitalists and workers, Durkheim believed that these groups could be united in occupational associations. He urged that these associations be set up to restore some collective morality to the modern world and to cope with some of the curable pathologies of the modern division of labor. But in the end, such narrow, structural reforms could not really cope with the broader cultural problems that plague the modern world. Here Durkheim invested some hope in the curious modern system of collective morality that he labeled the "cult of the individual."

Durkheim had comparatively little to say about micro-level phenomena, but this is not to say he had nothing to offer here. He had useful insights into human nature ("homo duplex"), socialization, and moral education. But micro-level phenomena are most often treated in his work as dependent variables determined by large-scale changes. Although Durkheim dealt with all major levels of social reality, he focused on the large-scale forces and their causal impact on the individual level.

The chapter closes with some reflections on the growing realization that there are great differences between Durkheim's early, more structural work and his later cultural turn. While the early work played a key role in the rise of mainstream sociological theories like structural functionalism, the later work has been instrumental in the development of theoretical perspectives (especially poststructuralism and postmodernism) that pose a profound threat to that mainstream.

6

EMILE DURKHEIM

*E*MILE Durkheim's theoretical orientation, unlike that of many other major sociological thinkers, contains little ambiguity. He was deeply concerned with the impact of the large-scale structures of society, and society itself, on the thoughts and actions of individuals. His work, as interpreted by Talcott Parsons and others, was most influential in shaping structural-functional theory, with its emphasis on social structure and culture. In light of this, our objective in this chapter is to describe Durkheim's theoretical perspective, with particular (but not exclusive) attention to its macrosociological concerns.

The development and use of the concept of a social fact lies at the heart of Durkheim's sociology. We will have a great deal to say about this concept in this chapter, but a brief introduction to it is needed at this point. In modern terms, *social facts* are the social structures and cultural norms and values that are external to, and

coercive of, actors. Thus readers of this text, as students, are constrained by such social structures as the university bureaucracy as well as the norms and values of American society, which place such great importance on getting a college education. Similar social facts constrain people in all areas of social life.

To understand why Durkheim developed the concept of social fact and what it means, we need to examine at least a few aspects of the intellectual context in which he lived.

In Durkheim's (1900/1973:3) view, sociology was born in France in the nineteenth century. He recognized its roots in the ancient philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) and more proximate sources in French philosophers such as Montesquieu and Condorcet. For example, Durkheim noted, "It is Montesquieu who first laid down the fundamental principles of social science" (1893/1960:61). However, in Durkheim's view, Montesquieu (and Condorcet) did not go far enough: "They limited themselves to offering ingenious or novel views on social facts rather than seeking to create an entirely new discipline" (1900/1973:6). In sum, according to W. Watts Miller, Durkheim saw "Montesquieu as a pioneer of social science, freeing himself from earlier conceptions, but in some ways still their captive" (1993:694). Durkheim (1928/1962:142) gave Saint-Simon credit for first formulating the notion of a science of the social world, but Saint-Simon's ideas were seen as scattered and imperfect. Those ideas were, in Durkheim's view, perfected by Comte, "the first to make a coherent and methodical effort to establish the positive science of societies" (1900/1973:10).

Although the term *sociology* had been coined some years earlier by Comte, there was no field of sociology per se in late nineteenth-century France. There were no schools, departments, or even professors of sociology. There were a few thinkers who were dealing with ideas that were in one way or another sociological, but there was as yet no disciplinary "home" for sociology. Indeed, there was strong opposition from existing disciplines to the founding of such a field. The most significant opposition came from psychology and philosophy, two fields that claimed already to cover the domain sought by sociology. The dilemma for Durkheim, given his aspirations for sociology, was how to create for it a separate and identifiable niche.

To separate it from philosophy, Durkheim argued that sociology should be oriented toward empirical research. This seems simple enough, but the situation was complicated by Durkheim's belief that sociology was also threatened by a philosophical school *within* sociology itself. In his view, the two other major figures of the epoch who thought of themselves as sociologists, Comte and Spencer, were far more interested in philosophizing, in abstract theorizing, than they were in studying the social world empirically. If the field were to continue in the direction set by Comte and Spencer, Durkheim felt, it would become nothing more than a branch of philosophy. As a result, he found it necessary to attack both Comte and Spencer (Durkheim, 1895/1964:19–20). He accused both of substituting preconceived ideas of social phenomena for the actual study of the phenomena in the real world. Thus Comte was said to be guilty of assuming theoretically that the social world was evolving in the direction of an increasingly perfect society, rather than engaging in the hard, rigorous, and basic work of actually studying the changing nature of various societies. Similarly, Spencer was accused of assuming harmony in society rather than studying whether harmony actually existed.

SOCIAL FACTS

In order to help sociology move away from philosophy and to give it a clear and separate identity, in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim (1895/1964) argued that the distinctive subject matter of sociology should be the study of social facts (see Gane, 1988, for a discussion of the major criticisms of this work as well as a defense of it). The concept of social fact has several components, but crucial in separating sociology from philosophy is the idea that *social facts are to be treated as things*. In that they are to be treated as *things*, social facts are to be studied empirically, *not* philosophically.[1] Durkheim believed that ideas can be known introspectively (philosophically), but *things* "cannot be conceived by purely mental activity"; they require for their conception "data from outside the mind" (1895/1964:xliii). This empirical study of social facts as things sets Durkheimian sociology apart from the largely introspective theorizing of Comte and Spencer.

Although treating social facts as things countered the threat from philosophy (at least as far as Durkheim was concerned), it was only part of the answer to the problem of dealing with the threat coming from psychology. Like Durkheimian sociology, psychology was already highly empirical. To differentiate sociology from psychology, Durkheim argued that social facts were *external to*, and *coercive of*, the actor. Sociology was to be the study of social facts, whereas the study of psychological facts was relegated to psychology. To Durkheim, psychological facts were basically inherited phenomena. Although this certainly does not describe psychology today (and was not a very accurate description of the subject matter of psychology even then), it did allow Durkheim to draw a clear differentiation between the two fields. Psychological facts are clearly internal (inherited), and social facts are external and coercive. As we will soon see, this differentiation is not so neat as Durkheim would have liked us to believe. Nevertheless, by defining a social fact as a *thing* that is *external to, and coercive of, the actor*, Durkheim seems to have done a reasonably good job (at least for that historical era) of attaining his objective of separating sociology from both philosophy and psychology. However, it should be noted that to do this, Durkheim took an "extremist" position (Karady, 1983:79–80), especially in limiting sociology to the study of social facts. This position was to limit at least some branches of sociology to the present day. Furthermore, Durkheim seemed to artificially sever sociology from neighboring fields. As Lemert puts it, "Because he defined sociology so exclusively in relation to its own facts, Durkheim cut it off from the other sciences of man" (1994a:91).

We know that a social fact is a thing and that it is external and coercive, but what else is a social fact? Actually, Durkheim differentiated between two broad types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. *Material social facts* are the clearer of the

---

[1] It is worth noting that Durkheim did a lot of what may be described as philosophizing.

two because they are real, material entities, but they are also of lesser significance in Durkheim's work. As Durkheim put it, "The social fact is sometimes materialized so far as to become an element of the external world" (1897/1951:313). Architecture and the law would be two examples of what he meant by material social facts. We will encounter other examples in this chapter.

The bulk of Durkheim's work, and the heart of his sociology, lies in the study of nonmaterial social facts. Durkheim said: "Not all social consciousness achieves . . . externalization and materialization" (1897/1951:315). What sociologists now call *norms* and *values*, or more generally culture (see Alexander, 1988a), are good examples of what Durkheim meant by *nonmaterial social facts.* But this idea creates a problem: How can nonmaterial social facts like norms and values be external to the actor? Where could they be found except in the minds of actors? And if they are in the minds of actors, then are they not internal rather than external?

To clarify this issue, we must refine Durkheim's argument by contending that while material social facts are clearly external and coercive, nonmaterial social facts are not so clear-cut. (For a similar distinction, see Takla and Pope [1985:82].) To at least some extent, they are found in the minds of actors. The best way to conceptualize nonmaterial social facts is to think of them as external to, and coercive of, psychological facts. In this way we can see that both psychological facts and *some* social facts exist within and between consciousness. Durkheim made this clear in a number of places. At one point he said of social facts, "Individual minds, forming groups by mingling and fusing, give birth to a being, *psychological if you will,* but constituting a psychic individuality of a new sort" (Durkheim, 1895/1964:103; italics added). At another point, Durkheim said, "This does not mean that they [nonmaterial social facts] are not also mental after a fashion, since they all consist of ways of thinking or behaving" (1895/1964:xlix). Thus it is best to think of nonmaterial social facts, at least in part, as mental phenomena, but mental phenomena that are external to, and coercive of, another aspect of the mental process—psychological facts. This confounds Durkheim's differentiation between sociology and psychology somewhat, but it does serve to make the differentiation more realistic and as a result more defensible. Sociology *is* concerned with mental phenomena, but they are usually of a different order from the mental concerns of psychology. Durkheim thus was arguing that sociologists are interested in norms and values, whereas psychologists are concerned with such things as human instincts.

Social facts, then, play a central role in the sociology of Emile Durkheim. A useful way of extracting the most important social facts from his work, and for analyzing his thoughts on the relationships among these phenomena, is to begin with Durkheim's efforts to organize them into *levels* of social reality. He began at the level of material social facts, not because it was the most important level to him, but because its elements often take causal priority in his theorizing. They affect nonmaterial social facts, which are the real focus of his work. (Although we will focus here on both types of social facts, we will have some things to say later about Durkheim's thoughts on the more microscopic aspects of social reality.)

The major levels of social reality (Lukes, 1972:9–10) in Durkheim's work can be depicted as follows:

A. Material Social Facts
  1. Society
  2. Structural components of society (for example, church and state)
  3. Morphological components of society (for example, population distribution, channels of communication, and housing arrangements) (Andrews, 1993)
B. Nonmaterial Social Facts
  1. Morality
  2. Collective conscience
  3. Collective representations
  4. Social currents

The levels within the two categories are listed in terms of descending order of generality.

It is his focus on macro-level social facts that is one of the reasons why Durkheim's work played a central role in the development of structural functionalism, which has a similar, macro-level orientation (see Chapter 13, on Parsons). More specifically, drawing on biology and using an organismic analogy (Lehmann, 1993a:15), Durkheim saw society as composed of "organs" (social facts), or social structures, that had a variety of functions for society. Durkheim urged that we distinguish functions, or the ends served by various structures, from the factors that caused them to come into existence. Durkheim was interested in studying both the causes of social structures and the functions they perform, although he wanted to carefully differentiate between these two topics of study.

We can trace the logic of Durkheim's theory in his analysis of the development of the modern world. This is most clearly shown in one of his most important works, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Durkheim, 1893/1964), a work that has been called sociology's first classic (Tiryakian, 1994).

THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN SOCIETY

Durkheim based his analysis in *The Division of Labor in Society* on his conception of two ideal types of society. The more primitive type, characterized by *mechanical solidarity,* has a relatively undifferentiated social structure, with little or no division of labor. The more modern type, characterized by *organic solidarity,* has a much greater and more refined division of labor. To Durkheim the *division of labor in society* is a material social fact that involves the degree to which tasks or responsibilities are specialized. People in primitive societies tend to occupy very general positions in which they perform a wide variety of tasks and handle a large number of responsibilities. In other words, a primitive person tended to be a jack-of-all-trades. In contrast, those who live in more modern societies occupy more specialized positions and have a much narrower range of tasks and responsibilities. For example, being a mother-housewife in primitive societies is a much less

EMILE DURKHEIM: A Biographical Sketch

Emile Durkheim was born on April 15, 1858, in Epinal, France. He was descended from a long line of rabbis and himself studied to be a rabbi, but by the time he was in his teens, he had largely rejected his heritage. From that time on, his lifelong interest in religion was more academic than theological (Mestrovic, 1988). He was dissatisfied not only with his religious training but also with his general education and its emphasis on literary and esthetic matters. He longed for schooling in scientific methods and in the moral principles needed to guide social life. He rejected a traditional academic career in philosophy and sought instead to acquire the scientific training needed to contribute to the moral guidance of society. Although he was interested in scientific sociology, there was no field of sociology at that time, so between 1882 and 1887 he taught philosophy in a number of provincial schools in the Paris area.

His appetite for science was whetted further by a trip to Germany, where he was exposed to the scientific psychology being pioneered by Wilhelm Wundt. In the years immediately after his visit to Germany, Durkheim published a good deal, basing his work, in part, on his experiences there (Jones, 1994). These publications helped him gain a position in the department of philosophy at the University of Bordeaux in 1887. There Durkheim offered the first course in social science in a French university. This was a particularly impressive accomplishment, because only a decade earlier, a furor had erupted in a French university by the mention of Auguste Comte in a student dissertation. Durkheim's main responsibility, however, was teaching courses in education to schoolteachers, and his most important course was in the area of moral education. His goal was to communicate a moral system to the educators, who he hoped would then pass the system on to young people in an effort to help reverse the moral degeneration he saw around him in French society.

The years that followed were characterized by a series of personal successes for Durkheim. In 1893 he published his French doctoral thesis, *The Division of Labor in Society*, as well as his Latin thesis on Montesquieu (W. Miller, 1993). His major methodological statement, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, appeared in 1895, followed (in 1897) by his empirical application of those methods in the study *Suicide*. By 1896 he had become a full professor at Bordeaux. In 1902 he was summoned to the famous French university, the Sorbonne, and in 1906 he was named professor of the science of education, a title that was changed in 1913 to professor of the science of education *and sociology*. The other of his most famous works, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, was published in 1912.

Durkheim is most often thought of today as a political conservative, and his influence within sociology certainly has been a conservative one. But in his time, he was considered a liberal, and this was exemplified by the active public role he played in the defense of Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish army captain whose court-martial for treason was felt by many to be anti-Semitic.

Durkheim was deeply offended by the Dreyfus affair, particularly its anti-Semitism. But Durkheim did not attribute this anti-Semitism to racism among the French people. Characteristically, he saw it as a symptom of the moral sickness confronting French society as a whole. He said:

> When society undergoes suffering, it feels the need to find someone whom it can hold responsible for its sickness, on whom it can avenge its misfortunes: and those against whom public opinion already discriminates are naturally designated for this role. These are the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. What confirms me in this interpretation is the way in which the result of Dreyfus's trial was greeted in 1894. There was a surge of joy in the boulevards. People celebrated as a triumph what should have been a cause for public mourning. At least they knew whom to blame for the economic troubles and moral distress in which they lived. The trouble came from the Jews. The charge had been officially proved. By this very fact alone, things already seemed to be getting better and people felt consoled.

(Lukes, 1972:345)

Thus, Durkheim's interest in the Dreyfus affair stemmed from his deep and lifelong interest in morality and the moral crisis confronting modern society.

To Durkheim, the answer to the Dreyfus affair and crises like it lay in ending the moral disorder in society. Because that could not be done quickly or easily, Durkheim suggested more specific actions such as severe repression of those who incite hatred of others and government efforts to show the public how it is being misled. He urged people to "have the courage to proclaim aloud what they think, and to unite together in order to achieve victory in the struggle against public madness" (Lukes, 1972:347).

Durkheim's (1928/1962) interest in socialism is also taken as evidence against the idea that he was a conservative, but his kind of socialism was very different from the kind that interested Marx and his followers. In fact, Durkheim labeled Marxism as a set of "disputable and out-of-date hypotheses" (Lukes, 1972:323). To Durkheim, socialism represented a movement aimed at the moral regeneration of society through scientific morality, and he was not interested in short-term political methods or the economic aspects of socialism. He did not see the proletariat as the salvation of society, and he was greatly opposed to agitation or violence. Socialism for Durkheim was very different from what we usually think of as socialism; it simply represented a system in which the moral principles discovered by scientific sociology were to be applied.

Durkheim, as we will see throughout this book, had a profound influence on the development of sociology, but his influence was not restricted to it. Much of his impact on other fields came through the journal *L'année sociologique*, which he founded in 1898. An intellectual circle arose around the journal with Durkheim at its center. Through it, he and his ideas influenced such fields as anthropology, history, linguistics, and—somewhat ironically, considering his early attacks on the field—psychology.

Durkheim died on November 15, 1917, a celebrated figure in French intellectual circles, but it was not until over twenty years later, with the publication of Talcott Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), that his work became a significant influence on American sociology.

---

specialized position than it is in a modern society. Laundry services, diaper services, home delivery, and labor-saving devices (dishwashers, microwave ovens, Cuisinarts, and so forth) perform a number of tasks that were formerly the responsibility of the mother-housewife.

The changes in the division of labor have had enormous implications for the structure of society, and some of the more important implications are reflected in the differences between the two types of solidarity—mechanical and organic. In addressing the issue of solidarity, Durkheim was interested in what holds society together. A society characterized by mechanical solidarity is unified because all people are generalists. The bond among people is that they are all engaged in similar

activities and have similar responsibilities. In contrast, a society characterized by organic solidarity is held together by the differences among people, by the fact that they have different tasks and responsibilities. Because people in modern society perform a relatively narrow range of tasks, they need many other people in order to survive. The primitive family headed by father-hunter and mother-food gatherer is practically self-sufficient, but the modern family, in order to make it through the week, needs the grocer, baker, butcher, auto mechanic, teacher, police officer, and so forth. These people, in turn, need the kinds of services that others provide in order to live in the modern world. Modern society, in Durkheim's view, is thus held together by the specialization of people and their need for the services of many others. Furthermore, Durkheim was concerned with the specialization not only of individuals but also of groups, structures, and institutions. One final difference between mechanical and organic solidarity is worth mentioning: Because people in societies characterized by mechanical solidarity are more likely to be similar to one another in terms of what they do, there is a greater likelihood of competition among them. In contrast, in societies with organic solidarity, differentiation allows people to cooperate more and to all be supported by the same resource base.

Thus a society characterized by organic solidarity leads to both more solidarity *and* more individuality than one characterized by mechanical solidarity (Rueschemeyer, 1994). In other words, Durkheim held the view that the social order and individual autonomy are compatible (Muller, 1994).

Dynamic Density

The division of labor was a material social fact to Durkheim because it is the pattern of interaction in the social world. Another, and closely related, material social fact is the major causal factor in Durkheim's theory of the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity—*dynamic density*. This concept refers to the number of people in a society and the amount of interaction that occurs among them. Neither population increase nor an increase in interaction, when taken separately, is a significant factor in societal change. An increase in numbers of people *and* an increase in the interaction among them (which is dynamic density) lead to the change from mechanical to organic solidarity because together they bring about more competition for scarce resources and a more intense struggle for survival among the various parallel and similar components of primitive society. Because individuals, groups, families, tribes, and so forth perform virtually identical functions, they are likely to clash over these functions, especially if resources are scarce. The rise of the division of labor allows people and the social structures they create to complement, rather than conflict with, one another, and this, in turn, makes peaceful coexistence more likely. Furthermore, the increasing division of labor makes for greater efficiency, with the result that resources increase, and more and more people can survive peacefully.

Although Durkheim was interested in explaining how the division of labor and dynamic density lead to different types of social solidarity, he was interested primarily in the impact of these material changes on, and the nature of, nonmaterial social facts in both mechanically and organically solidified societies. However, because of his image of what a *science* of sociology should be, Durkheim felt that it was impossible to study nonmaterial social facts directly. Direct consideration of nonmaterial social facts was, for him, more philosophical than sociological. In order to study nonmaterial social facts scientifically, the sociologist would have to seek and examine material social facts that reflect the nature of, and changes in, nonmaterial social facts. In *The Division of Labor in Society* it is law, and the differences between law in societies with mechanical solidarity and law in societies with organic solidarity, that plays this role.

Law

Durkheim argued that a society with mechanical solidarity is characterized by *repressive law*. Because people are very similar in this type of society, and because they tend to believe very strongly in a common morality, any offense against their shared value system is likely to be of significance to most individuals. Because most people feel the offense and believe deeply in the common morality, an offender is likely to be severely punished for any action that is considered an offense against the collective moral system. The theft of a pig must lead to the cutting off of the offender's hands; blaspheming against God or gods might well result in the removal of one's tongue. Because people are so involved in the moral system, an offense against it is likely to be met with swift, severe punishment.

In contrast, a society with organic solidarity is characterized by *restitutive law*. Instead of being severely punished for even seemingly minor offenses against the collective morality, individuals in this more modern type of society are likely simply to be asked to comply with the law or to repay—make restitution to—those who have been harmed by their actions. Although some repressive law continues to exist in a society with organic solidarity (for example, the death penalty), restitutive law is more characteristic. There is little or no powerful and coercive common morality; the vast majority of people do not react emotionally to a breach of the law. The monitoring of repressive law is largely in the hands of the masses in a society with mechanical solidarity, but the maintenance of restitutive law is primarily the responsibility of specialized agencies (for example, the police and the courts). This is consistent with the increased division of labor in a society with organic solidarity.

Changes in a material social fact like the law are, in Durkheim's theoretical system, merely reflections of changes in the more crucial elements of his sociology—nonmaterial social facts such as morality, collective conscience, collective representations, social currents, and, most questionably from a modern sociological perspective, the group mind. (All these concepts will be discussed in this chapter.)

At the most general and all-inclusive level, Durkheim was a sociologist of morality (Mestrovic, 1988; Turner, 1993). Indeed, Ernest Wallwork (1972:182)

argued that Durkheim's sociology is merely a by-product of his concern with moral issues. That is, Durkheim's interest in the moral problems of his day led him as a sociologist to devote most of his attention to the moral elements of social life. At its most basic level, Durkheim's great concern was with the declining strength of the common morality in the modern world. In Durkheim's view, people were in danger of a "pathological" loosening of moral bonds. These moral bonds were important to Durkheim, for without them the individual would be enslaved by ever-expanding and insatiable passions. People would be impelled by their passions into a mad search for gratification, but each new gratification would lead only to more and more needs. Durkheim held the seemingly paradoxical view that the individual needs morality and external control in order to be free. This is a curious definition of freedom, but it is the position that Durkheim took.

Anomie

Many of the problems that occupied Durkheim stem from his concern with the decline of the common morality. In the concept of *anomie*, Durkheim best manifested his concern with the problems of a weakened common morality (Hilbert, 1986). Individuals are said to be confronted with anomie when they are not faced with sufficient moral constraint, that is, when they do not have a clear concept of what is and what is not proper and acceptable behavior.

The central "pathology" in modern society was, in Durkheim's view, the *anomic division of labor*. By thinking of anomie as a pathology, Durkheim manifested his belief that the problems of the modern world can be "cured." Durkheim believed that the structural division of labor in modern society is a source of cohesion that compensates for the declining strength of the collective morality. However, the thrust of his argument is that the division of labor cannot entirely make up for the loosening of the common morality, with the result that anomie is a pathology associated with the rise of organic solidarity. Individuals can become isolated and be cut adrift in their highly specialized activities. They can more easily cease to feel a common bond with those who work and live around them. But it is important to remember that this is viewed by Durkheim as an abnormal situation, because only in unusual circumstances does the modern division of labor reduce people to isolated and meaningless tasks and positions. The concept of anomie can be found not only in *The Division of Labor* but also in *Suicide* (Durkheim, 1897/1951) as one of the major types of suicide. Anomic suicide occurs because of the decline in collective morality and the lack of sufficient external regulation of the individual to restrain his or her passions.

Collective Conscience

Durkheim attempted to deal with his interest in common morality in various ways and with different concepts. In his early efforts to deal with this issue, Durkheim developed the idea of the *collective conscience*, which he characterized in *The Division of Labor in Society* in the following way:

The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the *collective* or *common conscience*.... It is, thus, an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them.

(Durkheim, 1893/1964:79–80)

Several points are worth underscoring in this definition, given our interest in the collective conscience as an example of a nonmaterial social fact. First, it is clear that Durkheim thought of the collective conscience as occurring throughout a given society when he wrote of the "totality" of people's beliefs and sentiments. Second, Durkheim clearly conceived of the collective conscience as being an independent, determinate cultural system. Although he held such views of the collective conscience, Durkheim also wrote of its being "realized" through individual consciousness. (That Durkheim did *not* conceive of the collective conscience as totally independent of individual consciousness will be important when we examine the charge that Durkheim holds a group-mind concept.)

The concept of the collective conscience allows us to return to Durkheim's analysis, in *The Division of Labor*, of material social facts and their relationship to changes in the common morality. The logic of his argument is that the increasing division of labor (brought on by the increasing dynamic density) is causing a transformation (a diminution but not a disappearance) of the collective conscience. The collective conscience is of much less significance in a society with organic solidarity than it is in a society with mechanical solidarity. People in modern society are more likely to be held together by the division of labor and the resulting need for the functions performed by others than they are by a shared and powerful collective conscience. Anthony Giddens (1972; see also Pope and Johnson, 1983) performed a useful service by pointing out that the collective conscience in the two types of society can be differentiated on four dimensions—volume, intensity, rigidity, and content. *Volume* refers to the number of people enveloped by the collective conscience; *intensity* to how deeply the individuals feel about it; *rigidity* to how clearly it is defined; and *content* to the form that the collective conscience takes in the two polar types of society. In a society characterized by mechanical solidarity, the collective conscience covers virtually the entire society and all its members; it is believed in with great intensity (as reflected, for one thing, by the use of repressive sanctions when it is violated); it is extremely rigid; and its content is highly religious in character. In a society with organic solidarity, the collective conscience is much more limited in its domain and in the number of people enveloped by it; it is adhered to with much less intensity (as reflected in the substitution of restitutive for repressive laws); it is not very rigid; and its content is best described by the phrase "moral individualism," or the elevation of the importance of the individual to a moral precept.

Collective Representations

The idea of the collective conscience, while useful to Durkheim, clearly is very broad and amorphous. Durkheim's dissatisfaction with the character of the concept

of the collective conscience led him to abandon it (at least explicitly) progressively in his later work in favor of the much more specific concept of collective representations. *Collective representations* may be seen as specific states, or substrata, of the collective conscience (Lukes, 1972). In contemporary terms, we may think of collective representations as the norms and values of specific collectivities such as the family, occupation, state, and educational and religious institutions. The concept of collective representations can be used both broadly and specifically, but the critical point is that it allowed Durkheim to conceptualize nonmaterial social facts in a narrower way than the all-encompassing notion of the collective conscience. Despite their greater specificity, collective representations are *not* reducible to the level of individual consciousness: "*Representations collectives* result from the substratum of associated individuals . . . but they have *sui generis* characteristics" (Durkheim, cited in Lukes, 1972:7). The Latin term *sui generis* means "unique." When Durkheim used this term to refer to the structure of collective representations, he was saying that their unique character is not reducible to individual consciousness. This places them squarely within the realm of nonmaterial social facts. They transcend the individual because they do not depend on any particular individual for their existence. They are also independent of individuals in the sense that their temporal span is greater than the lifetime of any individual. Collective representations are a central component of Durkheim's system of nonmaterial social facts.

SUICIDE AND SOCIAL CURRENTS

Durkheim offered an even more specific (and more dynamic) and less crystallized concept that is also a nonmaterial social fact—*social currents*. These were defined by Durkheim as nonmaterial social facts "which have the same objectivity and the same ascendancy over the individual" as the social facts discussed above, but "without such crystallized form" (1895/1964:4). He gave as examples "the great movements of enthusiasm, indignation, and pity in a crowd" (Durkheim, 1895/1964:4). Although social currents are less concrete than other social facts, they are nevertheless social facts, as Durkheim made clear when he said, "They come to each one of us from without and can carry us away in spite of ourselves" (1895/1964:4).

Durkheim explicated the idea of social currents in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1964), but he used it as his major explanatory variable in an empirical study that became a model for the development of American empirical research (Selvin, 1958). In fact, the research reported in *Suicide* (1897/1951) can be seen as an effort to use the ideas developed in *The Rules* in an empirical study of a specific social phenomenon—suicide. In *Suicide* he demonstrated that social facts, in particular social currents, are external to, and coercive of, the individual. Durkheim chose to study suicide because it is a relatively concrete and specific phenomenon. There were relatively good data available on suicide, and above all it is generally considered to be one of the most private and personal of acts. Durkheim believed that if he could show that sociology had a role to play in explaining such a seemingly individualistic act as suicide, it would be relatively easy to extend sociology's domain to phenomena that are much more readily seen as open to sociological analysis. Finally, Durkheim chose to study suicide because if the intellectual community could be convinced of his case in the study of this phenomenon, then sociology would have a reasonable chance of gaining recognition in the academic world.

As a sociologist, Durkheim was not concerned with studying why any specific individual committed suicide. That was to be left to the psychologist. Instead, Durkheim was interested in explaining differences in suicide *rates*, that is, he was interested in why one group had a higher rate of suicide than another. Durkheim tended to assume that biological, psychological, and social-psychological factors remain essentially constant from one group to another or from one time period to another. If there is variation in suicide rates from one group to another or from one time period to another, Durkheim assumed that the difference would be due to variations in sociological factors, in particular, social currents.

Committed as he was to empirical research, Durkheim was not content simply to dismiss other possible causes of differences in suicide rates; instead he tested them empirically. He began *Suicide* with a series of alternative ideas about the causes of suicide. Among these are individual psychopathology, alcoholism (Skog, 1991), race, heredity, and climate. Although Durkheim marshaled a wide range of facts to reject each of these as crucial to differences in suicide rates, his clearest argument, and the one that was most consistent with his overall perspective, was on the relevance of racial factors to the differences. One of the reasons that race was rejected is that suicide rates varied among groups *within* the same race. If race were a significant cause of differences in suicide rates, then we would assume that it would have a similar impact on the various subgroups. Another piece of evidence against race as a significant cause of variations in rates is the change in rates for a given race when it moves from one society to another. If race were a relevant social fact, it should have the same effect in different societies. Although Durkheim's argument is not powerful here, and is even weaker on the other factors that he rejected, this does give us a feel for the nature of Durkheim's approach to the problem of empirically dismissing what he considered extraneous factors so that he could get to what he thought of as the most important causal variables.

In addition to rejecting the factors discussed above, Durkheim examined and rejected the imitation theory associated with the early French social psychologist Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904). The theory of imitation argues that people commit suicide (and engage in a wide range of other actions) because they are imitating the actions of others who have committed suicide. This social-psychological approach to sociological thinking is foreign to Durkheim's focus on social facts. As a result, Durkheim took pains to reject it. For example, Durkheim reasoned that if imitation were truly important, we should find that the nations that border on a country with a high suicide rate would themselves have high rates. He looked at the data on the significance of this geographical factor and concluded that no such relationship existed. Durkheim admitted that some individual suicides may be the result of imitation, but it is such a minor factor that it has no significant effect on the overall

suicide rate. In the end, Durkheim rejected imitation as a significant factor because of his view that only one social fact could be the cause of another social fact. Because imitation is a social-psychological variable, it cannot, in his system, serve as a significant cause of differences in social suicide rates. As Durkheim put it, "The social suicide-rate can be explained only sociologically" (1897/1951:299).

To Durkheim, the critical factors in changes in suicide rates were to be found in differences at the level of social facts. Of course, there are two types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. As usual, material social facts occupy the position of causal priority but not of causal primacy. For example, Durkheim looked at the significance of dynamic density for differences in suicide rates but found that its effect is only indirect. But differences in dynamic density (and other material social facts) do have an effect on differences in nonmaterial social facts, and these differences have a direct effect on suicide rates. Durkheim was making two related arguments. On the one hand, he was arguing that different collectivities have different collective consciences and collective representations. These, in turn, produce different social currents, which have differential effects on suicide rates. One way to study suicide is to compare different societies or other types of collectivities. On the other hand, Durkheim was arguing that changes in the collective conscience lead to changes in social currents, which, in turn, lead to changes in suicide rates. This leads to the historical study of changes in suicide rates within a given collectivity. In either case, cross-culturally or historically, the logic of the argument is essentially the same: differences or changes in the collective conscience lead to differences or changes in social currents, and these, in turn, lead to differences or changes in suicide rates. In other words, changes in suicide rates are due to changes in social facts, primarily social currents. Durkheim was quite clear on the crucial role played by social currents in the etiology of suicide:

> Each social group has a collective inclination for the act, quite its own, and the source of all individual inclination rather than their result. It is made up of *currents of egoism, altruism or anomy* running through . . . society. . . . These tendencies of the whole social body, by affecting individuals, cause them to commit suicide.
>
> (Durkheim, 1897/1951:299–300; italics added)

The Four Types of Suicide

Durkheim's theory of suicide, and the structure of his sociological reasoning, can be seen more clearly if we examine each of his four types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic (Bearman, 1991). Durkheim linked each of the types of suicide to the degree of integration into, or regulation by, society. *Integration* refers to the degree to which collective sentiments are shared. Altruistic suicide is associated with a high degree of integration and egoistic suicide with a low degree of integration. *Regulation* refers to the degree of external constraint on people. Fatalistic suicide is associated with high regulation, anomic suicide with low regulation. Whitney Pope (1976:12–13) offered a very useful summary of the four types of suicide discussed by Durkheim. He did this by interrelating high and low degrees of integration and regulation in the following way:

Integration	Low →	Egoistic suicide
	High →	Altruistic suicide
Regulation	Low →	Anomic suicide
	High →	Fatalistic suicide

Egoistic Suicide High rates of *egoistic suicide* are likely to be found in those societies, collectivities, or groups in which the individual is not well integrated into the larger social unit. This lack of integration leads to a sense of meaninglessness among individuals. Societies with a strong collective conscience and the protective, enveloping social currents that flow from it are likely to prevent the widespread occurrence of egoistic suicide by, among other things, providing people with a sense of the broader meaning of their lives. When these social currents are weak, individuals are able rather easily to surmount the collective conscience and do as they wish. In large-scale social units with a weak collective conscience, individuals are left to pursue their private interests in whatever way they wish. Such unrestrained egoism is likely to lead to considerable personal dissatisfaction, because all needs cannot be fulfilled, and those that are fulfilled simply lead to the generation of more and more needs and, ultimately, to dissatisfaction—and, for some, to suicide (Breault, 1986). However, strongly integrated families, religious groups, and polities act as agents of a strong collective conscience and discourage suicide. Here is the way Durkheim puts it in terms of religious groups:

> Religion protects man against the desire for self-destruction. . . . What constitutes religion is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are, the stronger the integration of the religious community, also the *greater its preservative* value.
>
> (Durkheim, 1897/1951:170; italics added)

The disintegration of society produces distinctive social currents, and these are the principal causes of differences in suicide rates. For example, Durkheim talked of societal disintegration leading to "currents of depression and disillusionment" (1897/1951:214). The moral disintegration of society predisposes the individual to commit suicide, but the currents of depression must also be there to produce differences in rates of egoistic suicide. Interestingly, Durkheim was here reaffirming the importance of social forces, even in the case of egoistic suicide, where the individual might be thought to be free of social constraints. Actors are *never* free of the force of the collectivity: "However individualized a man may be, there is always something collective remaining—the very depression and melancholy resulting from this same exaggerated individualism. He effects communion through sadness when he no longer has anything else with which to achieve it" (Durkheim, 1897/1951:214). The case of egoistic suicide indicates that in even the most individualistic, most private of acts, social facts are the key determinant.

phenomena. Such a conception is not susceptible to the group-mind charge, but its defense is complicated, because in order to lay out a separate domain for sociology, Durkheim often made some highly exaggerated claims about social facts. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Durkheim often talked as if social facts were rigidly separated from psychological facts, and such a separation would be supportive of the group-mind argument. However, in other places Durkheim admitted that this was an artificial dichotomy; in other words, nonmaterial social facts are firmly anchored in the mental processes of individuals (1893/1964:350); see also Lukes, 1972:16).

Durkheim put to rest once and for all the group-mind thesis:

Either the *collective conscience* floats like a void, a kind of indescribable absolute, or else it is connected to the rest of the world by a substratum upon which, consequently, it is dependent. Moreover, what can this substratum be made up of, if it is not the members of society as they are combined socially?

(Durkheim, cited in Giddens, 1972:159)

It seems that Durkheim, outside of some outrageous arguments made to justify a niche for the fledgling sociology, offered an eminently reasonable position on nonmaterial social facts. Durkheim began with an interest in this level, retained it throughout his career, and, if anything, grew even more interested in it in his later years. This increasing concern can best be seen in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* published in 1912.

RELIGION

As we have seen, Durkheim felt the need to focus on material manifestations of nonmaterial social facts (for example, law in *The Division of Labor* and suicide rates in *Suicide*). But in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Durkheim felt comfortable enough to address nonmaterial social facts, in particular religion, more directly.[3] Religion is, in fact, the ultimate nonmaterial social fact, and an examination of it allowed him to shed new light on this entire aspect of his theoretical system. Religion has what Durkheim calls a "dynamogenic" quality; that is, it has the capacity not only to dominate individuals but also to elevate them above their ordinary abilities and capacities (Jones, 1986).

Although the research reported in *The Elementary Forms* is not Durkheim's own, he felt it necessary, given his commitment to empirical science, to embed his thinking on religion in published data. The major sources of his data were studies of a primitive Australian tribe, the Arunta. Durkheim felt it important to study religion within such a primitive setting for several reasons. First, he believed that it is much easier to gain insight into the essential nature of religion in a primitive setting than in more modern society. Religious forms in primitive society could be "shown in all their nudity," and it would require "only the slightest effort to lay them open" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:18). Second, the ideological systems of primitive religions are less well developed than those of modern religions, with the

---

[3] Alexander (1988a:11) argues that it is this work that forms the basis of renewed contemporary interest in cultural studies. Collins (1988b:108) sees it as his "most important book."

---

result that there is less obfuscation. As Durkheim put it, "That which is accessory or secondary . . . has not yet come to hide the principal elements. All is reduced to that which is indispensable, to that without which there could be no religion" (1912/1965:18). Third, whereas religion in modern society takes diverse forms, in primitive society there is "intellectual and moral conformity" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:18). As a result, religion can be studied in primitive society in its most pristine form. Finally, although Durkheim studied primitive religion, it was not because of his interest in that religious form per se. Rather, he studied it in order "to lead to an understanding of the religious nature of man, that is to say, to show us an essential and permanent aspect of humanity" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:13). More specifically, Durkheim examined primitive religion to shed light on religion in modern society.

Given the uniform and ubiquitous character of religion in primitive societies, we may equate that religion with the collective conscience. That is, religion in primitive society is an all-encompassing collective morality. But as society develops and grows more specialized, religion comes to occupy an increasingly narrow domain. Instead of being the collective conscience in modern society, religion becomes simply one of a number of collective representations. Although it expresses some collective sentiments, other institutions (for example, law and science) come to express other aspects of the collective morality. Although Durkheim recognized that religion per se comes to occupy an ever narrower domain, he also contended that most, if not all, of the various collective representations of modern society have their origin in the all-encompassing religion of primitive society.

Sacred and Profane

The ultimate question for Durkheim was the source of modern religion. Because specialization and the ideological smoke screen make it impossible to study directly the roots of religion in modern society, Durkheim addressed the issue in the context of primitive society. The question is: Where does primitive (and modern) religion come from? Operating from his basic methodological position that only one social fact can cause another social fact, Durkheim concluded that society is the source of all religion. Society (through individuals) creates religion by defining certain phenomena as sacred and others as profane. Those aspects of social reality that are defined as *sacred*—that is, that are set apart and deemed forbidden—form the essence of religion. The rest are defined as *profane*—the everyday, the commonplace, the utilitarian, the mundane aspects of life. The sacred brings out an attitude of reverence, respect, mystery, awe, and honor. The respect accorded to certain phenomena transforms them from the profane to the sacred.

The differentiation between the sacred and the profane, and the elevation of some aspects of social life to the sacred level, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the development of religion. Three other conditions are needed. First, there must be the development of a set of religious beliefs. These *beliefs* are "the representations which express the nature of sacred things and the relations which they sustain, either with each other or with profane things" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:56). Second, a set of religious *rites* is necessary. These are "the rules of

conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:56). Finally, a religion requires a *church,* or a single overarching moral community. The interrelationships among the sacred, beliefs, rites, and church led Durkheim to the following definition of a religion: *"A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them"* (1912/1965:62).

Totemism

Durkheim's view that society is the source of religion shaped his examination of totemism among the Australian Arunta. *Totemism* is a religious system in which certain things, particularly animals and plants, come to be regarded as sacred and as emblems of the clan. Durkheim viewed totemism as the simplest, most primitive form of religion. It is paralleled by a similarly primitive form of social organization, the *clan*. If Durkheim could have shown that the clan is the source of totemism, he could have demonstrated his argument that society is at the root of religion. Here is the way that Durkheim made this argument:

> A religion so closely connected to a social system surpassing all others in simplicity may well be regarded as the most elementary religion we can possibly know. If we succeed in discovering the origins of the beliefs which we have just analyzed, we shall very probably discover at the same time the causes leading to the rise of the religious sentiment in humanity.
>
> (Durkheim, 1912/1965:195)

Although a clan may have a large number of totems, Durkheim was not inclined to view these as a series of separate, fragmentary beliefs about specific animals or plants. Instead, he tended to view them as an interrelated set of ideas that give the clan a more or less complete representation of the world. The plant or animal is not the source of totemism; it merely represents that source. The totems are the material representations of the immaterial force that is at their base. And that immaterial force is none other than the now familiar collective conscience of society:

> Totemism is the religion, not of such and such animals or men or images, but of an anonymous and impersonal force, found in each of these beings but not to be confounded with any of them. . . . Individuals die, generations pass and are replaced by others; but this force always remains actual, living and the same. It animates the generations of today as it animated those of yesterday and as it will those of tomorrow.
>
> (Durkheim, 1912/1965:217)

Totemism, and more generally religion, is derived from the collective morality and becomes itself an impersonal force. It is not simply a series of mythical animals, plants, personalities, spirits, or gods.

Collective Effervescence

The collective conscience is the source of religion, but where does the collective conscience itself come from? In Durkheim's view, it comes from only one source—society. In the primitive case examined by Durkheim, this meant that the clan is the ultimate source of religion. Durkheim was quite explicit on this point: "Religious force is nothing other than the collective and anonymous force of the clan" (1912/1965:253). Although we may agree that the clan is the source of totemism, the question remains: How does the clan create totemism? The answer lies in a central but little discussed component of Durkheim's conceptual arsenal—*collective effervescence.*

The notion of collective effervescence is not well spelled out in any of Durkheim's works, including *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* He seemed to have in mind, in a general sense, the great moments in history when a collectivity is able to achieve a new and heightened level of collective exaltation that in turn can lead to great changes in the structure of society. The Reformation and the Renaissance would be examples of historical periods when collective effervescence had a marked effect on the structure of society. Durkheim also argued that it is out of collective effervescence that religion arises: "It is in the midst of these effervescent social environments and out of this effervescence itself that the religious idea seems to be born" (1912/1965:250). During periods of collective effervescence, the clan members create totemism.

In sum, totemism is the symbolic representation of the collective conscience, and the collective conscience, in turn, is derived from society. Therefore, society is the source of the collective conscience, religion, the concept of God, and ultimately everything that is sacred (as opposed to profane). In a very real sense, then, we can argue that the sacred (and ultimately God, as something sacred) and society are one and the same. This is fairly clear-cut in primitive society. It remains true today, even though the relationship is greatly obscured by the complexities of modern society.

SOCIAL REFORMISM

We have now worked our way through most of Durkheim's most important types of nonmaterial social facts—morality, collective conscience, collective representations, social currents, and religion. These concepts were at the center of Durkheim's thinking from the beginning of his career. Earlier we touched on the significance of material social facts in Durkheim's work, but it is clear that they were not nearly as important to him as nonmaterial social facts. They occupy the role of either causal priorities to nonmaterial social facts (for example, dynamic density in *The Division of Labor*) or objective indices of nonmaterial social facts (for example, law in *The Division of Labor*). There is still another significant part that material social facts play in Durkheim's system—as structural solutions to the moral problems of our times.

Durkheim was a social reformer who saw problems in modern society as temporary aberrations and not as inherent difficulties (Fenton, 1984:45). In taking this position, he stood in opposition to both the conservatives and the radicals of his day. Conservatives like Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre saw no hope in modern society and sought instead a return to a more primitive type of existence. Radicals like the Marxists of Durkheim's time agreed that the world could not be

reformed, but they hoped that a revolution would bring into existence socialism and communism. In contrast, Durkheim, following up on his analogy between social and biological processes, argued that the problems of the day were "pathologies" that could be "cured" by the "social physician" who recognized the moral nature of the modern world's problems and undertook structural reforms to alleviate them. For example, in *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim talked of three abnormal, or pathological, forms of the division of labor. These are caused by temporary or transient forces and are not inherent in modern society. The pathologies Durkheim described are anomie, inequality in the structure of the work world (the wrong people in the wrong positions), and inadequate organization (incoherence) in the work world.

Durkheim was a reformist, not a radical or a revolutionary. Thus, when he devoted a book to socialism, it was to study it as a social fact, not to outline a revolutionary doctrine (Durkheim, 1928/1962). He was quite explicit about his political position in discussing his interest in the study of social facts:

> Our reasoning is not at all revolutionary. We are even, in a sense, essentially conservative, since we deal with social facts as such, recognize their flexibility, but conceive them as deterministic rather than arbitrary. How much more dangerous is the doctrine which sees in social phenomena only the results of unrestrained manipulation, which can in an instant, by a simple dialectical artifice, be completely upset.
>
> (Durkheim, 1895/1964:xxxviii–xxxix)[4]

More specific to a communist revolution, Durkheim said:

> Let us suppose that by a miracle the whole system of property is entirely transformed overnight and that on the collectivist formula the means of production are taken out of the hands of the individual and made over absolutely to collective ownership. All the problems around us that we are debating today will still persist in their entirety.
>
> (Durkheim, 1957:30)

Occupational Associations

The major reform that Durkheim proposed for social pathologies was the development of occupational associations. In looking at the organizations of his time, Durkheim did not believe that there was a basic conflict of interest among the various types of people found within them—owners, managers, and workers. In this, of course, he was taking a position diametrically opposed to that of Marx, who saw an essential conflict of interest between the owners and the workers. Durkheim believed that such a clash was occurring at that time because the various people involved lacked a common morality and that the lack of morality was traceable to the lack of an integrative structure. He suggested that the structure that was needed to provide this integrative morality was the occupational association, which would encompass "all the agents of the same industry united

[4] Not only was Durkheim treating us to his own conservative politics, but he also was attacking the revolutionary theories of Marx and Marx's followers.

and organized into a single group" (Durkheim, 1893/1964:5). Such an organization was deemed to be different from, and superior to, such organizations as labor unions and employer associations, which in Durkheim's view served only to intensify the differences between owners, managers, and workers. Involved in a common organization, people in these categories would recognize their common interests as well as their common need for an integrative moral system. That moral system, with its derived rules and laws, would serve to counteract the tendency toward atomization in modern society as well as help stop the decline in significance of collective morality.

Cult of the Individual

In the end, structural reform was subordinated in Durkheim's mind to changes in the collective morality. He believed that the essential problems of modern society were moral in nature and that the only real solution lay in reinforcing the strength of the collective morality. Although Durkheim recognized that there was no returning to the powerful collective conscience of societies characterized by mechanical solidarity, he felt that a modern, although weakened, version of it was emerging. He labeled the modern form of the collective conscience the *cult of the individual* (Chriss, 1993; Tole, 1993). This was a curious concept for Durkheim, because it seems to fuse the seemingly antagonistic forces of morality and individualism. Embedded in this concept is the idea that individualism is becoming the moral system of modern society:

> For Durkheim, this was an ethic of individualism that grounded human freedom in communal solidarity, an ethic which affirmed the rights of the individual in relation to the well-being of all citizens rather than to individual achievement in the pursuit of self-interest. It was an ethic that represented the true expression of the ideals of individualism, and for Durkheim was the only solution to the problem of how the individual could remain 'more solidary while becoming more autonomous.'
>
> (Tole, 1993:26)

Elevated to the status of a moral system, individualism was acceptable to Durkheim. What he continued to oppose was egoism, because this is individualism without a collective base; it is rampant hedonism. Presumably, by following a morality of individualism, the actor would be able to keep his or her passions in check. Ironically, paradoxically, and ultimately a bit unsatisfactorily, Durkheim proposed the cult of the individual as the solution to modern egoism. It appears that Durkheim came to recognize that there was no stemming the tide of individualism in modern society, so rather than continue to fight it, he made the best of a bad situation (judged by his moral principles) by elevating at least some forms of individualism to the level of a moral system. One of the many problems with this view is the virtual impossibility of differentiating in real life between actions based on moral individualism and those based on egoism. However, Durkheim might argue that it is possible to distinguish between people guided by a morality which requires them to give due recognition to the inherent dignity, rights, and freedom

of the individual and people who are simply acting to promote their own egotistically defined self-interest.

THE ACTOR IN DURKHEIM'S THOUGHT

The bulk of this chapter is devoted to Durkheim's concern with social facts. However, Durkheim had insights into the microscopic aspects of social reality, and we will deal with some of them here. The reader should keep in mind that much of what Durkheim offered at this level was derived from his overriding interest in social facts and cannot really be separated from it.

Durkheim's often overly zealous arguments for sociology and against psychology have led many to argue that he had little to offer on the human actor and the nature of action (Lukes, 1972:228). Many contend that Durkheim had little to say about individual consciousness (Nisbet, 1974:32; Pope, 1975:368, 374), because he did not feel that it was amenable to scientific analysis. As Robert Nisbet put it:

> We cannot go to internal states of mind. . . . Consciousness, though real enough, will not serve the austere tests of scientific method. If we are to study mere phenomena in an objective fashion, we must substitute for the internal fact of consciousness an external index which symbolizes it and study the former in light of the latter.
>
> (Nisbet, 1974:52, see also Pope, 1976:10–11)

Although there is some truth to this claim, it grossly exaggerates the reality to be found in Durkheim's work. Although Durkheim may have made statements against the study of consciousness, he did deal with it in a variety of places and ways. Nevertheless, it is true that he treated the actor, and the actor's mental processes, as secondary factors, or more commonly as dependent variables to be explained by the independent and focal factors—social facts.

Durkheim was critical of dealing with consciousness, but he demonstrated his awareness of the significance of mental processes and even integrated them directly into his work. Although he made a similar point in several places (for example, Durkheim, 1897/1951:315), the following is Durkheim's clearest statement of his interest in mental processes:

> In general, we hold that sociology has not completely achieved its task so long as it has not penetrated into the mind . . . of the individual in order to relate the institutions it seeks to explain to their psychological conditions. . . . Man is for us less a point of departure than a point of arrival.
>
> (Durkheim, cited in Lukes, 1972:498–499)

It appears that Durkheim focused on "external" facts—suicide rates, laws, and so forth—because they are open to scientific analysis, but he did not deem such a macroscopic focus sufficient in itself. The ultimate goal was to integrate an understanding of mental processes into his theoretical system. This is manifest, for example, in his work on suicide, in which social causes are linked to subjective states. Even though he never quite achieved an adequate integration, he did address the issue of consciousness in several different ways.

Assumptions about Human Nature

We may gain insight into Durkheim's views on consciousness by examining his assumptions about human nature. Despite having made a number of crucial assumptions about human nature, Durkheim denied that he had done so. He argued that he did *not* begin by postulating a certain conception of human nature in order to deduce a sociology from it. Instead, he said that it was from sociology that he sought an increasing understanding of human nature. However, Durkheim may have been less than honest with us, and perhaps even with himself.

Durkheim did in fact identify a number of components of human nature. At a basic level, he accepted the existence of biological drives. But of greater significance to sociology, he acknowledged the importance of social feelings, including "love, affection, sympathetic concern, and associated phenomena" (Wallwork, 1972:28). Durkheim viewed people as naturally social, for "if men were not naturally inclined toward their fellows, the whole fabric of society, its customs and institutions, would never arise" (Wallwork, 1972:29–30). However, these sentiments did not play an active role in his sociology, and he therefore relegated them to psychology. Another of Durkheim's basic assumptions, which received only scant attention from him, is the idea that people are able to think: "Men differ from animals, Durkheim contends, precisely because images and ideas intervene between innate inclinations and behavior" (Wallwork, 1972:30).

Whereas the preceding are of marginal significance to his work, another of Durkheim's assumptions about human nature—one that we have already encountered—may be viewed as the basis of his entire sociology. That assumption is that people are endowed with a variety of egoistic drives that, if unbridled, constitute a threat to themselves as well as to society. To Durkheim, people possess an array of passions. If these passions are unrestrained, they multiply to the point where the individual is enslaved by them. This led Durkheim to his curious (on the surface) definition of *freedom* as external control over passions. People are free when their passions are constrained by external forces, and the most general and most important of these forces is the common morality. It can be argued that Durkheim's entire theoretical edifice, especially his emphasis on collective morality, was erected on this basic assumption about people's passions. As Durkheim put it, "Passion individualizes, yet it also enslaves. Our sensations are essentially individual; yet we are more personal the more we are freed from our senses and able to think and act with concepts" (1912/1965:307–308). This same issue is manifest in the differentiation Durkheim made between body and soul and the eternal conflict between them (1914/1973). The body represents the passions; the soul stands for civilization's common morality. "They mutually contradict and deny each other" (Durkheim, 1914/1973:152). Clearly, Durkheim wished this conflict to be resolved in the direction of the soul rather than of the body: "It is civilization that has made man what he is; it is what distinguishes him from the animal: man is man only because he is civilized" (1914/1973:149).

For Durkheim, freedom came from without rather than from within. This requires a collective conscience to constrain the passions. "Morality begins with disinterest, with attachment to something other than ourselves" (Durkheim, 1914/1973:151).

But freedom, or autonomy, has another sense in Durkheim's work. That is, freedom is also derived from the internalization of a common morality that emphasizes the significance and independence of the individual (Lukes, 1972:115, 131). However, in both senses freedom is a characteristic of society, not of individuals. Here, as elsewhere, we see the degree to which Durkheim emphasized nonmaterial social facts (in this case "moral individualism") over mental processes.

We can also include *individual representations* within Durkheim's assumptions about human nature. Whereas collective representations are created by the interaction of people, individual representations are formed by the interaction of brain cells. Individual representations were relegated to psychology, as were many other aspects of Durkheim's thoughts on consciousness. This is the portion of the mental process that Durkheim was unwilling to explore, and it is on this that he is most vulnerable to attack. George Homans (1969), for example, argued that Durkheim exhibited a very limited conception of psychology by confining it to the study of instincts. The psychology of today goes far beyond the study of instincts and encompasses a number of social phenomena that Durkheim would have seen as part of sociology. Homans concluded that "sociology is surely not a corollary of the kind of psychology Durkheim had in mind" (1969:18). However, it is much harder, if not impossible, in Homans's view, to clearly separate sociology from the psychology of today.

Running through much of this discussion (body and soul; individual and collective representations) is a sense of the duality of human nature, of *homo duplex.* As Durkheim puts it, "our inner life has something that is like a double center of gravity. On the one hand is our individuality—and, more particularly, our body in which it is based; on the other is everything in us that expresses something other than ourselves" (1914/1973:152). Not only do these dual states of consciousness exist within us, but they are mutually contradictory:

It is not without reason, therefore, that man feels himself to be double: he actually is double. There are in him two classes of states of consciousness that differ from each other in origin and nature, and in the ends toward which they aim. One class merely expresses our organisms and the objects to which they are most directly related. Strictly individual, the states of consciousness of this class connect us only with ourselves, and we can no more detach them from us than we can detach ourselves from our bodies. The states of consciousness of the other class, on the contrary, come to us from society; they transfer society into us and connect us with something that surpasses us. Being collective, they are impersonal; they turn us toward ends that we hold in common with other men; it is through them and them alone that we can communicate with others. It is, therefore, quite true that we are made up of two parts, and are like two beings, which, although they are closely associated, are composed of very different elements and orient us in opposite directions.

(Durkheim, 1914/1973:161–162)

Thus, we are led to live a double existence. In addition to the perpetual tension that this creates, Durkheim was most concerned with the need to strengthen the collective aspects of ourselves in order to better control the excesses of our individual passions.

Socialization and Moral Education

Given his views on innate human passions and the need to constrain them by common morality, it should come as no surprise that Durkheim was very much interested in the *internalization* of social morals through education and, more generally, through socialization. Social morality exists primarily at the cultural level, but it is also internalized by the individual. In Durkheim's words, common morality "penetrates us" and "forms part of us" (Lukes, 1972:131).

Durkheim was not concerned primarily with the issue of internalization but rather with how it bore upon the cultural and structural problems of his day (Pope, 1976:195). He did not specify how the common morality was internalized. He was much more concerned with what seemed to be a lessening of the power of this internalization of morality in contemporary society. The essence of the matter for Durkheim was the decline in the degree to which social facts exercise constraint upon consciousness. As Robert Nisbet put it, "Durkheim would never really abandon the idea that the Western society he knew was undergoing a major crisis and that the crisis consisted at bottom in a pathological loosening of moral authority upon the lives of individuals" (1974:192). Durkheim put it this way: "History records no crisis as serious as that in which European societies have been involved for more than a century. Collective discipline in its traditional form has lost its authority" (1973:101). Durkheim's interest in anomie in both *Suicide* and *The Division of Labor in Society* can be seen as a manifestation of this concern.

Much of Durkheim's work on education, and socialization in general, can be seen in light of this concern for moral decay and possible reforms to halt the spread of it. *Education* and *socialization* were defined by Durkheim as the processes by which the individual learns the ways of a given group or society—acquires the physical, intellectual, and, most important to Durkheim, moral tools needed to function in society (Durkheim, 1922/1956:71). Moral education has three important aspects (Wallwork, 1972).

First, its goal is to provide individuals with the *discipline* they need to restrain the passions that threaten to engulf them:

The totality of moral regulations really forms about each person an imaginary wall, at the foot of which a multitude of human passions simply die without being able to go further. For the same reason—that they are contained—it becomes possible to satisfy them. But if at any point this barrier weakens, human forces—until now restrained—pour tumultuously through the open breach; once loosed, they find no limits where they can or must stop.

(Durkheim, 1973:42)

More specifically, on the education of children, Durkheim says that only through discipline "and by means of it alone are we able to teach the child to rein in his desires, to set limits to his appetites of all kinds, to limit, and through limitation, to define the goals of his activity. This limitation is the condition of happiness and of moral health" (1973:43–44).

Second, individuals are provided with a sense of autonomy, but it is a characteristically atypical kind of autonomy in which "the child understands the

reasons why the rules prescribing certain forms of behavior should be 'freely desired,' that is to say, 'willingly accepted' by virtue of 'enlightened assent' " (Wallwork, 1972:127).

Finally, the process of socialization aims at developing a sense of devotion to society and to its moral system. These aspects of moral education are efforts to combat the pathological loosening of the grip of collective morality on the individual in modern society.

At the most general level, Durkheim was concerned with the way in which collective morality constrains people both externally and internally. In one sense, nonmaterial social facts stand outside people and shape their thoughts (and actions). Of course, social facts cannot act on their own but only through their agents. Of greater importance, however, is the degree to which individuals constrain themselves by internalizing social morality. As Durkheim put it, "The collective force is not entirely outside of us; it does not act upon us wholly from without; but rather, since society cannot exist except in and through individual consciousness, this force must also penetrate us and organize itself within us" (1912/1965:240). In addition to making clear the process of internalization, the preceding quotation also shows once again that Durkheim rejected the idea of a group mind, for he stated that collective forces can exist only in individual consciousness. Ernest Wallwork did an excellent job of clarifying the importance of the internalization of morality in Durkheim's system:

A normal mind, Durkheim observes, cannot consider moral maxims without considering them as obligatory. Moral rules have an "imperative character"; they "exercise a sort of ascendancy over the will which feels constrained to conform to them." This constraint is not to be confused with physical force or compulsion; the will is not forced to conform to the norms it entertains even if these norms are enforced by public opinion. Moral "constraint does not consist in an exterior and mechanical pressure; it has a more intimate and psychological character." But this intimate, psychological sense of obligation is, nevertheless, none other than the authority of public opinion which penetrates, like the air we breathe, into the deepest recesses of our being.

(Wallwork, 1972:38)

Durkheim offered a specific example of internal constraint in his study on religion:

If [an individual] acts in a certain way towards the totemic beings, it is not only because the forces resident in them are physically redoubtable, but because he feels himself morally obliged to act thus; he has the feeling that he is obeying an imperative, that he is fulfilling a duty.

(Durkheim, 1912/1965:218)

All these concerns can be seen in the context of the constraining effect of collective morality on the actor. Whether the constraint is external or internal, it still comes down to collective morality controlling the thoughts and actions of individuals.

Durkheim's limited thoughts on consciousness led many people to assume that his ideal actor is one who is almost wholly controlled from without—a total conformist. Although there is much to recommend this view—and some modern sociologists in following Durkheim seem to have adopted this position—Durkheim himself did not subscribe to such an extreme view of the actor: "Conformity must not be pushed to the point where it completely subjugates the intellect. Thus it does not follow from a belief in the need for discipline that it must be blind and slavish" (cited in Giddens, 1972:113). Durkheim does see a role for individuals: they are all not simply mirror images of collective ideas; there is individuality. Each of us has unique temperaments, habits, and so forth. "Each of us puts his own mark on them [collective ideas]; and this accounts for the fact that each person has his own particular way of thinking . . . about the rules of common morality" (Durkheim, 1914/1973:161; see also Durkheim 1913–14/1983:91–92). Although Durkheim left open the possibility of individuality, the thrust of his work is in the direction of outlining external constraints on actors and, furthermore, the desirability of such constraint.

Dependent Variables

In Durkheim's works, consciousness most often occupies the position of a dependent variable, determined by various material and especially nonmaterial social facts.

Durkheim viewed sociologically relevant subjective states as the product of social causes. They "are like prolongations . . . inside individuals" . . . of the social causes on which they depend. They may enter sociological explanations as effects, but never as causes. Appeal to subjective states as causal agents, according to Durkheim, threatened the legitimacy of sociology's claim to scientific status by reducing it to psychology.

(Pope, Cohen, and Hazelrigg, 1975:419)

Although we will discuss several such dependent variables, it should be made clear that Durkheim usually dealt with them in only a vague and cursory way. In *Suicide*, for example, Durkheim was quite uncertain about how social currents affect individual consciousness and how changed consciousness, in turn, leads to a heightened likelihood of suicide (Pope, 1976:191). The same criticism applies to every other treatment by Durkheim of consciousness.

In *The Division of Labor*, consciousness was dealt with indirectly, but it is clear that it is a dependent variable. That is, the sense of the argument is that changes at the cultural and societal levels lead to changes in the processes of individual consciousness. In a society with mechanical solidarity, individual consciousness is limited and highly constrained by a powerful collective conscience. In a society with organic solidarity, individual potentials expand, as does individual freedom. But again, although this sense of consciousness as a dependent variable is there, it was left largely implicit by Durkheim. In *Suicide*, however, the status of consciousness as a dependent variable is much clearer. Schematically, the main independent variable is collective morality, and the ultimate dependent variable is suicide rate, but intervening is another set of dependent variables that can only be mental states. Steven Lukes, in the following statement about "weak points" in the individual, implied the mental level: "The

currents impinge from the outside on suicide-prone individuals at their 'weak points' " (1972:214).

Lukes (1972:216–217) went further on this issue and argued that there is a social-psychological theory beneath the "aggressively sociologistic language" found in *Suicide*. One part of that theory is the belief that individuals need to be attached to social goals. Another aspect is that individuals cannot become so committed to such goals that they lose all personal autonomy. Finally, as we have discussed before, there was Durkheim's belief that individuals possess passions and that they can be contented and free only if these passions are restrained from without.

We find in *Suicide* specific conscious states associated with each of the three main types of suicide:

> These subjective states, themselves effects of given social conditions, impel the individual to suicide. . . . The egoistic suicide is characterized by a general depression in the form either of melancholic languor or Epicurean indifference. . . . Anomic suicide is accompanied by anger, disappointment, irritation, and exasperated weariness . . . while the altruistic suicide may experience a calm feeling of duty, the mystic's enthusiasm, or peaceful courage.
>
> (Pope, 1976:197)

Durkheim perceived well-defined states of consciousness accompanying each form of suicide. It is clear that these were peripheral interests for him, as he maintained a consistently large-scale focus. Even such an ardent supporter as Nisbet wished that Durkheim had given more attention to individual consciousness: "Admittedly, one might wish that Durkheim had given more attention to the specific mechanisms by which collective representations in society are translated, in distinctly human, often creative ways, into the individual representations that reflect man's relationship to society" (1974:115). Lukes made the same point: "[Durkheim's] exclusive concentration on the society end of the schema, on the impact of social conditions on individuals rather than the way individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to social conditions, led him to leave inexplicit and unexamined the social-psychological assumptions on which his theories rested" (1972:35).

Mental Categories We can find a specific example of this tendency to accord priority to the level of society in Durkheim and Marcel Mauss's[5] work on the impact of the structure of society on the form of individual thought. Basically, Durkheim (and Mauss) argued that the form society takes affects the form that thought patterns take. Contesting those who believe that mental categories shape the social world, they believed that the social world shapes mental categories: "Far from it being the case . . . that the social relations of men are based on logical relations between things, in reality it is the former which have provided the prototype for the latter" (Durkheim and Mauss, 1903/1963:82). Although specific large-scale structures (for

example, family structure and economic and political systems) play a role in shaping logical categories, Durkheim and Mauss devoted most of their attention to the effect of society as a whole:

> Society was not simply a model which classificatory thought followed; it was its own divisions which served as divisions for the system of classification. The first logical categories were social categories; the first classes of things were classes of men. . . . It was because men were grouped, and thought of themselves in the form of groups, that in their ideas they grouped other things, and in the beginning the two modes of grouping were merged to the point of being indistinct.
>
> (Durkheim and Mauss, 1903/1963:82–83)

Durkheim's emphasis on large-scale phenomena is well illustrated by this discussion of the impact of society on logical categories. However, Durkheim did not analyze the corresponding process—the way in which the operation of mental categories, in turn, shapes the structures of society.

To create a more adequate sociology, Durkheim had to do more with consciousness than treat it as an unexplored dependent variable. An almost total focus on large-scale phenomena leaves out important elements of an adequate sociological model. Lukes made some telling points in his discussion of *Suicide*. He argued, quite rightly, that an adequate explanation of suicide cannot stop with an examination of social currents. In his view, "Explaining suicide—and explaining suicide rates—*must* involve explaining why people commit it" (Lukes, 1972:221; italics added). But Durkheim was wrong in assuming that consciousness is not open to scientific inquiry and explanation. Such inquiry can and must be undertaken if we are to go beyond partial theories of social life. Nothing is solved by simply acknowledging the existence of consciousness and refusing to examine it. Durkheim's commitment to a narrow view of science led him astray, as did his tendency toward making radically sociologistic statements that rule out recourse to consciousness:

> He need only have claimed that "social" facts cannot be wholly explained in terms of "individual" facts; instead he claimed that they can only be explained in terms of social facts. . . . It would have been enough to have claimed that no social phenomenon, indeed few human activities, can either be identified or satisfactorily explained without reference, explicit or implicit, to social factors.
>
> (Lukes, 1972:20)

Durkheim also failed to give consciousness an active role in the social process. People are in general controlled by social forces in his system; they do not actively control those systems. Thus, Wallwork contended that "the principal weakness . . . is Durkheim's failure to consider *active* moral judgment" (1972:65; italics added). Durkheim gave too little independence to actors (Pope and Cohen, 1978:1364). Actors can reject some, most, or perhaps even all of the moral principles to which they are exposed. When Durkheim did talk of autonomy, it was in terms of the acceptance of moral norms of autonomy. Individuals seem capable of accepting moral constraint and of controlling themselves only through the internalization of

---

[5] Marcel Mauss, Durkheim's nephew and a scholar of some note, coauthored the material on mental categories with Durkheim.

such norms. But as Wallwork pointed out, autonomy has a much more active component: "Autonomy also involves willful exploration, spontaneous initiative, competent mastery, and creative self-actualization. . . . The child must also be encouraged to exercise his own will, initiative, and creativity" (1972:148).

Indeed, research into cognitive processes, in part done by Jean Piaget, who was working in the Durkheimian tradition, indicates that individual creativity is an important component of social life. In summarizing the work of Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg (who did research on the cognitive elements in moral development), and others, Wallwork said:

> In addition to cultural conditioning, the cognitive activity of the subject is necessary to constitute the experience. Piaget and Kohlberg conclude from their studies that the distinctive phenomenological character of moral experience is always as much a product of the cognitive construction of the subject as it is an accommodation to cultural conditioning by the subject.
>
> (Wallwork, 1972:67)

In other words, a more complete sociology requires a more creative actor and deeper insight into the creative processes.

We have seen that, contrary to the view of many, Durkheim did have a variety of things to say about mental processes. However, the peripheral character of mental processes in his theoretical system makes his insights vague and amorphous. More damning is the fact that the thrust of his work leads to a passive image of the actor, although an active actor is, in this author's view, an essential component of a fully adequate sociological theory.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION AND INTERACTION

Durkheim was weakest in his work on individual action and interaction. Implied in his system are various changes at this level resulting from changes at the level of large-scale social phenomena, but they are not detailed. For example, it seems clear that the nature of action and interaction is quite different in societies with mechanical rather than organic solidarity. The individual in a society with mechanical solidarity is likely to be enraged at a violation of the collective conscience and to act quickly and aggressively toward the violator. In contrast, an individual in a society with organic solidarity is more likely to take a more measured approach, such as calling the police or suing in the courts.[6] Similarly, in *Suicide* the assumption behind the study of changes in suicide rates is that the nature of individual action and interaction changes as a result of alterations in social currents. Suicide rates are used as cumulative measures of changes at the individual level, but the nature of these changes is not explored, at least not in any detail. Similar points could be made about Durkheim's other works, but the critical point is that individual action and interaction are largely unanalyzed in Durkheim's work.

[6] Although in some cases (for example, an assault on one's baby), people in both types of society are likely to react violently. Thus, to some degree, differences between the two societies are dependent on the nature of the crime.

EARLY AND LATE DURKHEIMIAN THEORY

There has been growing awareness in recent years of differences between Durkheim's early thinking (in, for example, *The Division of Labor*) and his later thinking as represented in the preceding discussion of his work on religion. Alexander describes the early work as having an "emphasis on external constraints and 'coercive social facts' on the one hand, and with positivistic, often quantitative methods on the other" (1988c:2). In other words, his early work tended to be highly structural and scientistic. In contrast, in his later work Durkheim tended to focus more on culture than on structure. His interest in religion in general—and more specifically in the distinction between the sacred and the profane, totemism, collective effervescence, symbols, and rituals—can be included under the heading of culture. It was the early Durkheimian perspective that tended to influence sociological theory (especially structural functionalism) first, but in recent years it is the later work that has grown in importance (Alexander, 1988a), especially with the rise of the sociology of culture and of cultural studies outside of sociology.

Part of this later work is the previously discussed work by Durkheim and Mauss (1903/1963) on mental categories. It is interesting to note that this work was influential in the development of a line of French social theory that has run through structuralism to poststructuralism to postmodernism (see Chapter 2). These theories, especially poststructuralism and postmodernism, represent a critique of mainstream sociological theory and pose a profound threat to that theory. Thus, interestingly, while early Durkheimian theory helped spawn mainstream sociological theory, his later work helped create theoretical developments that threaten that mainstream. As Lemert says, Durkheim's early work "began an intellectual labor that, in addition to producing sociology itself, gave rise in due course to another body of thought and moral concern that aims today, rightly or wrongly, to rethink the world Durkheim and his sociology helped invent" (1994a:92).

SUMMARY

Emile Durkheim offered a more coherent theory than any of the other classical sociological theorists. He articulated a rather clear theoretical orientation and used it in a variety of specific works. Supporters would say that the clarity of Durkheim's thinking stems from this coherence, whereas detractors might contend that the clarity is the result of the comparative simplicity of his theory. Whatever the case, it is certainly easier to convey the essence of Durkheim's thinking than that of the other classical theorists.

The heart of Durkheim's theory lies in his concept of social fact. Durkheim differentiated between two basic types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. Although they often occupied a place of causal priority in his theorizing, material social facts (for example, division of labor, dynamic density, and law) were not the most important large-scale forces in Durkheim's theoretical system. The most important focus for Durkheim was on nonmaterial social facts. He dealt with a number of them, including collective conscience, collective representations, and social currents.

Durkheim's study of suicide is a good illustration of the significance of non-material social facts in his work. In his basic causal model, changes in nonmaterial social facts ultimately cause differences in suicide rates. Durkheim differentiated among four types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic—and showed how each is affected by different changes in social currents. The study of suicide was taken by Durkheim and his supporters as evidence that sociology has a legitimate place in the social sciences. After all, it was argued, if sociology could explain so individualistic an act as suicide, then it certainly could be used to explain other, less individual aspects of social life.

Given his focus on nonmaterial social facts and some unfortunate statements made in an effort to define a distinctive domain for sociology, Durkheim is sometimes accused of having a metaphysical, "group-mind" orientation. Despite some seemingly indefensible statements, Durkheim did not believe in a group mind and, in fact, had a very modern conception of culture.

In his later work, Durkheim focused on another aspect of culture, religion. In his analysis of primitive religion, Durkheim sought to show the roots of religion in the social structure of society. It is society that defines certain things as sacred and others as profane. Durkheim demonstrated the social sources of religion in his analysis of primitive totemism and its roots in the social structure of the clan. Furthermore, totemism was seen as a specific form of the collective conscience as manifested in a primitive society. Its source, as well as the source of all collective products, lies in the process of collective effervescence. In the end, Durkheim argued that religion and society are one and the same, two manifestations of the same general process.

Because he identified society with God, and because he deified society, Durkheim did not urge social revolution. Instead, he should be seen as a social reformer interested in improving the functioning of society. Whereas Marx saw irreconcilable differences between capitalists and workers, Durkheim believed that these groups could be united in occupational associations. He urged that these associations be set up to restore some collective morality to the modern world and to cope with some of the curable pathologies of the modern division of labor. But in the end, such narrow, structural reforms could not really cope with the broader cultural problems that plague the modern world. Here Durkheim invested some hope in the curious modern system of collective morality that he labeled the "cult of the individual."

Durkheim had comparatively little to say about micro-level phenomena, but this is not to say he had nothing to offer here. He had useful insights into human nature ("homo duplex"), socialization, and moral education. But micro-level phenomena are most often treated in his work as dependent variables determined by large-scale changes. Although Durkheim dealt with all major levels of social reality, he focused on the large-scale forces and their causal impact on the individual level.

The chapter closes with some reflections on the growing realization that there are great differences between Durkheim's early, more structural work and his later cultural turn. While the early work played a key role in the rise of mainstream sociological theories like structural functionalism, the later work has been instrumental in the development of theoretical perspectives (especially poststructuralism and postmodernism) that pose a profound threat to that mainstream.