

# SOCIOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

by  
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which it takes from the neural cell, and sociology would become applied psychology.<sup>1</sup> But even the example of psychology shows that this conception of science should be discarded. Beyond the ideology of the psycho-sociologist and the materialistic naturalism of the socio-anthropologist there is room for a sociological naturalism which would see in social phenomena specific facts, and which would undertake to explain them while preserving a religious respect for their specificity. Nothing is wider of the mark than the mistaken accusation of materialism which has been levelled against us. Quite the contrary: from the point of view of our position, if one is to call the distinctive property of the individual representational life *spirituality*, one should say that social life is defined by its *hyper-spirituality*. By this we mean that all the constituent attributes of mental life are found in it, but elevated to a very much higher power and in such a manner as to constitute something entirely new. Despite its metaphysical appearance, this word designates nothing more than a body of natural facts which are explained by natural causes. It does, however, warn us that the new world thus opened to science surpasses all others in complexity; it is not merely a lower field of study conceived in more ambitious terms, but one in which as yet unsuspected forces are at work, and of which the laws may not be discovered by the methods of interior analysis alone.

<sup>1</sup> When we use the word 'psychology' by itself we mean individual psychology, and for the sake of clarity in discussion it is convenient to limit the word to this. Collective psychology is sociology, quite simply—why not employ the latter term exclusively? Inversely the word 'psychology' has always designated the science of the individual mentality—why not reserve this meaning to it? Thus we should avoid much ambiguity.

## II THE DETERMINATION OF MORAL FACTS<sup>1</sup>

### THESES

**M**ORAL reality, like all reality, can be studied from two different points of view. One can set out to explore and understand it and one can set out to evaluate it. The first of these problems, which is theoretical, must necessarily precede the second, and it is the only one with which we shall deal here. In closing, however, we shall show that the methods followed and the solutions adopted leave the field clear for the treatment of the practical problem.

For the theoretical study of moral reality we must determine beforehand the nature of moral facts. In order to observe them we must know their characteristics so that we can recognize them. This is the first question we shall deal with. Later we shall see if it is possible to give a satisfactory explanation of these characteristics.

### I

What are the distinctive characteristics of a moral fact?

All morality appears to us as a system of rules of conduct. But all techniques are equally ruled by maxims that prescribe the behaviour of the agent in particular circumstances. What then is the difference between moral rules and other rules of technique?

(i) We shall show that moral rules are invested with a

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*. The theses reproduced here were distributed to the members by Durkheim. They are followed by part of his discussion of these theses at the seminar which took place on 11 February, 1906.



special authority by virtue of which they are obeyed simply because they command. We shall reaffirm, as a result of a purely empirical analysis, the notion of duty and nevertheless give a definition of it closely resembling that already given by Kant. Obligation is, then, one of the primary characteristics of the moral rule.

(ii) In opposition to Kant, however, we shall show that the notion of duty does not exhaust the concept of morality. It is impossible for us to carry out an act simply because we are ordered to do so and without consideration of its content. For us to become the agents of an act it must interest our sensibility to a certain extent and appear to us as, in some way, *desirable*. Obligation or duty only expresses one aspect abstracted from morality. A certain degree of desirability is another characteristic no less important than the first.

Something of the nature of duty is found in the desirability of morality. If it is true that the content of the act appeals to us, nevertheless its nature is such that it cannot be accomplished without effort and self-constraint. The *élan*, even the enthusiasm, with which we perform a moral act takes us outside ourselves and above our nature, and this is not achieved without difficulty and inner conflict. It is this *sui generis* desirability which is commonly called *good*.

Desirability and obligation are the two characteristics which it is useful to stress, without necessarily denying the existence of others. It will be our main intention to show that all moral acts have these two characteristics, even though they may be combined in different proportions.

In order to give some idea of these two partly contradictory aspects of moral facts, we shall compare them to the idea of *sacredness*, which has the same duality. The sacred being is in a sense forbidden; it is a being which may not be violated; it is also good, loved and sought after. The association of these two qualities will be justified: (i) historically by an examination of the filiation which links them; (ii) by examples taken from contemporary

morality. The human personality is a sacred thing; one dare not violate it nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others.

## 2

Having determined these characteristics, we should try to discover a means of understanding how it is that certain precepts are obeyed because they command, and also cause us to perform those acts which are desirable in the sense that we have noted above. A methodical reply to this question would call for as exhaustive a study as possible of the particular rules the sum total of which constitutes our morality. But instead of such a study, which is impossible in these circumstances, it is possible to use more summary means to arrive at results of some value.

By examining the contemporary moral consciousness (and checking our findings by what we know of the moralities of all known peoples) we can agree upon the following points: (i) The qualification 'moral' has never been given to an act which has individual interests, or the perfection of the individual from a purely egotistic point of view, as its object; (ii) if I as an individual do not constitute *in myself* a moral end, this is also true of the other individuals who are more or less like me; (iii) from which we conclude that, *if a morality exists*, it can only have as object the group formed by the associated individuals—that is to say, society, *with the condition that society be always considered as being qualitatively different from the individual beings that compose it*. Morality begins with membership of a group, whatever that group may be. When this premise is accepted the characteristics of the moral fact become explicable. First, we shall show how society is good and desirable for the individual who cannot exist without it or deny it without denying himself, and how at the same time, because society surpasses the individual, he cannot desire it without to a certain extent violating his nature as an individual.



Secondly, we shall show that society, while being good, constitutes a moral authority which, by manifesting itself in certain precepts particularly important to it, confers upon them an obligatory character.

We shall endeavour further to establish that certain ends—devotion between individuals, the devotion of a scientist to his work—which are not in themselves moral ends, participate of morality indirectly and by derivation.

Finally, an analysis of collective sentiments will explain the characteristic of *sacredness* which is attributed to moral facts; an analysis which will, however, only serve to confirm the preceding analysis.

## 3

The objection has been made to this conception that it subjugates the mind to the prevailing moral opinion. This is not so. The society that morality bids us desire is not the society as it *appears* to itself, but the society as it is or is really becoming. The consciousness which society may have of itself which is expressed in general opinion (*dans et par l'opinion*) may be an inadequate view of the underlying reality. It is possible that opinion, weighed down by survivals, lags behind the real condition of the society. It is also possible that, under the effect of passing circumstances, certain principles, even though essential to the existing morality, may for a time be relegated to the unconscious and so appear not to exist. The science of morality will allow us to rectify these errors, of which we shall later give examples.

But we shall maintain that it is impossible to desire a morality other than that endorsed by the condition of society at a given time. To desire a morality other than that implied by the nature of society is to deny the latter and, consequently, oneself.

The question remains: Should a man deny himself? This is a legitimate question, but we shall not examine it. We shall postulate that we are right in wishing to live.

## Discussion

DURKHEIM: I must first of all confess briefly to a certain embarrassment. In agreeing to discuss *ex abrupto* a question as general as that announced in the second part of the programme<sup>1</sup> distributed to you, I am forced to do violence to my habitual methods of procedure. Certainly, in the course which I have been giving at the Sorbonne for four years upon the theoretical and applied science of *mores*, I have not held back from this problem. However, whereas in the classical school it was the starting-point, I can see it only as the end of my researches. I cannot attempt to explain the general characteristics of moral facts until I have passed carefully in review the details of moral rules (domestic, civic, professional or contractual) and have shown both the causes that give rise to them and the functions which they perform, in so far as the data of science at present permit. Thus I collect on my way a number of ideas which arise directly from the study of moral facts, and when I come to pose the general question its solution is already prepared; the solution rests on concrete realities and the mind is thus bound to see it from the correct point of view. In exposing my ideas here without having previously subjected them to these tests, I am obliged to present them rather unarmed. Where scientific demonstration is impossible I shall substitute a purely dialectical argument.

I hope, however, that among people of equal good faith dialectic is never worthless. This is particularly so in the field of morality where, despite all the facts that one may assemble, hypotheses are always so important. Finally, I have been tempted by the pedagogic side of the question. From this point of view I believe that the ideas which I shall put forward can find a place in the teaching of morality, a part of education which today lacks the degree of vitality that it needs.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 35.



## I

Moral reality appears to us under two different aspects that must be clearly distinguished: the objective and the subjective.

Each people at a given moment of its history has a morality, and it is in the name of this ruling morality that tribunals condemn and opinion judges. For a given group there is a clearly defined morality. I postulate, then, supported by the facts, that there is a general morality common to all individuals belonging to a collectivity.

Now, apart from this morality there is an indefinite multitude of others. Each individual moral conscience expresses the collective morality in its own way. Each one sees it and understands it from a different angle. No individual can be completely in tune with the morality of his time, and one could say that there is no conscience that is not in some ways immoral. Each mind, under the influence of its milieu, education or heredity sees moral rules by a different light. One individual will feel the rules of civic morality keenly, but not so strongly the rules of domestic morality, or inversely. Another who feels only very slightly the duties of charity may have a profound respect for contract and justice. The most essential aspects of morality are seen differently by different people.

I do not intend to treat here of both these two sorts of moral reality, but only of the first. I shall deal with objective moral reality, that common and impersonal standard by which we evaluate action. The diversity of individual moral consciences shows how impossible it is to make use of them in order to arrive at an understanding of morality itself. Research into the conditions that determine these individual variations of morality would, no doubt, be an interesting psychological study, but would not help us to reach our particular goal.

Just as I am not concerned with the manner in which this or that particular individual sees morality, I also

leave on one side the opinions of philosophers and moralists. I have nothing whatever to do with their systematic attempts to explain or construct moral reality except in so far as one can find in them a more or less adequate expression of the morality of their time. A moralist has a far greater sensibility than the average man to the dominant moral trends of his time, and consequently his consciousness is more representative of the moral reality. But I refuse to accept his doctrines as explanations, as scientific expressions of past or present moral reality.

The subject of my research and the kind of moral reality which I shall study have now been defined. But this reality can be studied in two different ways: (i) We can try to discover and to understand it, or (ii) we can set out to evaluate it at particular times.

Here I do not intend to discuss the second problem. We must begin with the first. Faced with the confusion of present moral ideas, a methodical approach is indispensable. We must begin at the beginning and progress from facts on which common agreement can be reached to see where the divergences occur. In order to judge or appreciate morality, as to evaluate life or nature (for value judgments can apply to the whole realm of reality), one must begin by acquainting oneself with moral reality.

Thus the first condition for the theoretical study of moral reality is to be able to recognize it and to distinguish it from other realities; in brief, to define it. This is not a question of giving it a philosophical definition; that can come when our research has made some headway. All that is possible or profitable is an initial, provisional definition that permits us to agree upon the reality we are dealing with; such a definition is obviously indispensable if we are to know what we are talking about.

The first question that confronts us, as in all rational and scientific research, is: By what characteristics can we recognize and distinguish moral facts?

Morality appears to us to be a collection of maxims, of



rules of conduct. But there are also other rules that prescribe our behaviour. All utilitarian techniques are governed by analogous systems of rules, and we must find the distinguishing characteristics of moral rules. If we consider all the rules that govern conduct we shall be able to see whether there are not some that have peculiar and specific characteristics. If we agree that the rules that show these characteristics conform to the popular conception<sup>1</sup> of moral rules we shall be able to apply to them the usual title and to say that here we have the characteristics of moral reality.

To achieve any result at all in this research there is only one method of proceeding. We must discover the intrinsic differences between these moral rules and other rules through their apparent and exterior differences, for at the beginning this is all that is accessible to us. We must find a reagent that will force moral rules to demonstrate their specific character. The reagent we shall employ is this: We shall put these various rules to the test of violation and see whether from this point of view there is not some difference between moral rules and rules of technique.

The violation of a rule generally brings unpleasant consequences to the agent. But we may distinguish two different types of consequence: (i) The first results mechanically from the act of violation. If I violate a rule of hygiene that orders me to stay away from infection, the result of this act will automatically be disease. The act, once it has been performed, sets in motion the consequences, and by analysis of the act we can know in advance what the result will be. (ii) When, however, I violate the rule that forbids me to kill, an analysis of my act will tell me nothing. I shall not find inherent in it the subsequent blame or punishment.

<sup>1</sup> The scientific notion is not the same as the popular notion, which may be erroneous. Popular opinion may deny the qualification *moral* to rules which show all the signs of being moral precepts. All that is necessary is that the difference be not so great as to render the retention of the more usual term inconvenient. Thus the zoologist may speak of 'fish' even though his conception is not identical with the popular one.

There is complete heterogeneity between the act and its consequence. It is impossible to discover *analytically* in the act of murder the slightest notion of blame. The link between act and consequence is here a *synthetic* one.

Such consequences attached to acts by synthetic links I shall call *sanctions*. I do not as yet know the origin or explanation of this link. I merely note its existence and nature, without at the moment going any further.

We can, however, enlarge upon this notion. Since sanctions are not revealed by analysis of the act that they govern, it is apparent that I am not punished *simply because* I did this or that. It is not the intrinsic nature of my action that produces the sanction which follows, but the fact that the act violates the rule that forbids it. In fact, one and the same act, identically performed with the same material consequences, is blamed or not blamed according to whether or not there is a rule forbidding it. The existence of the rule and the relation to it of the act determine the sanction. Thus homicide, condemned in time of peace, is freed from blame in time of war. An act, intrinsically the same, which is blamed today among Europeans, was not blamed in ancient Greece since there it violated no pre-established rule.

We have now reached a deeper conception of sanctions. A sanction is the consequence of an act that does not result from the content of that act, but from the violation by that act of a pre-established rule. It is because there is a pre-established rule, and the breach is a rebellion against this rule, that a sanction is entailed.

Thus there are rules that present this particular characteristic: We refrain from performing the acts they forbid simply because they are forbidden. This is what is meant by the obligatory character of the moral rule. We re-discover by a rigorously empirical analysis the idea of *duty* and obligation almost as Kant understood it.

We have so far only considered negative sanctions (blame, punishment), since in these the characteristic of



obligation is most apparent. There are sanctions of another kind. Acts that conform to the moral rule are praised and those who accomplish them are honoured. In this case the public moral consciousness reacts in a different way and the consequence of the act is favourable to the agent, but the mechanism of this social phenomenon is the same. As in the preceding instance the sanction comes, not from the act itself, but from its conformity to a rule that prescribes it. No doubt this type of obligation differs slightly from the former in degree, but we have here two varieties of the same group. There are not two kinds of moral rules, negative and positive commands; both are but two classes within the same category.

We have, then, defined moral obligation, and it is a definition not without interest. It shows how far the latest perfected utilitarian moralities have misconceived the problem of morality. Spencer's morality, for example, betrays a complete ignorance of the nature of obligation. For him punishment is no more than the mechanical consequence of an act (this is most apparent in his *Education* on the subject of school punishments<sup>1</sup>). This erroneous idea that punishment arises automatically from the act itself is widespread. In a recent inquiry into godless morality may be found the letter of a scientist who is interested in philosophy and maintains that the only punishment that a secular moralist can consider is the evil consequence of immoral acts (intemperance ruins the health, etc.).

In this way one evades the moral problem, which is precisely to explain duty, to explain its foundations and in what way it is not a hallucination but a reality.

So far we have followed Kant fairly closely. But if his analysis of moral acts is in part correct, it is nevertheless incomplete and insufficient, since it shows us only one aspect of moral reality.

We cannot perform an act which is not in some way

<sup>1</sup> *Education, Intellectual, Physical and Moral*, Ch. III, London, 1861. D.F.P.

meaningful to us simply because we have been commanded to do so. It is psychologically impossible to pursue an end to which we are indifferent—i.e. that does not appear to us as *good* and does not affect our sensibility. Morality must, then, be not only obligatory but also desirable and desired. This *desirability* is the second characteristic of all moral acts.

This desirability peculiar to moral life participates of the preceding characteristic of obligation, and is not the same as the desirability of the objects that attract our ordinary desires. The nature of our desire for the commanded act is a special one. Our *élan* and aspiration are accompanied by discipline and effort. Even when we carry out a moral act with enthusiasm we feel that we dominate and transcend ourselves, and this cannot occur without a feeling of tension and self-restraint. We feel that we do violence to a part of our being. Thus we must admit a certain element of eudemonism and one could show that desirability and pleasure permeate the obligation. We find charm in the accomplishment of a moral act prescribed by a rule that has no other justification than that it is a rule. We feel a  *sui generis*  pleasure in performing our duty simply because it is our duty. The notion of good enters into those of duty and obligation just as they in turn enter into the notion of good. Eudemonism and its contrary pervade moral life.

Duty, the Kantian Imperative, is only one abstract aspect of moral reality. In fact, moral reality always presents simultaneously these two aspects which cannot, in fact, be isolated. No act has ever been performed as a result of duty alone; it has always been necessary for it to appear in some respect as good. Inversely there is no act that is purely desirable, since all call for some effort.

Just as the idea of obligation, the first characteristic of moral life, gave us the opportunity to criticize utilitarianism, the second characteristic, that of goodness, shows us the insufficiency of Kant's explanation of moral obligation. Kant's hypothesis, according to which the sentiment of obligation was due to the heterogeneity of reason and



sensibility, is not easy to reconcile with the fact that moral ends are in one aspect objects of desire. If to a certain extent sensibility has the same end as reason, it cannot be humbled by submitting to the latter.

Are these, then, the only two characteristics of moral reality? They are not, and I could demonstrate others. The two that I have just noted appear to me to be the most important, constant and universal. I know of no moral rule or morality where they are not found. However, in different instances they combine in varied proportions. There are acts which are accomplished almost exclusively by enthusiasm, acts of moral heroism where the element of obligation is at a minimum and where the idea of goodness predominates. There are others also where the idea of duty finds a minimum of support in the sensibility. The relation between these two elements also varies with time; thus in antiquity it would appear that the notion of duty was on the wane; in the systems of morality, and perhaps in the everyday life of the people, the idea of the Sovereign Good predominated. Generally speaking, I believe it is the same wherever morality is essentially religious. In the same epoch the relation of the two elements may vary in the extreme in different individuals. Different persons feel in different degrees the attraction of one or other of these elements, and it is very rarely indeed that both exert an equal attraction. Each one of us has his moral blind spots. There are those for whom moral acts are above all good and desirable; there are those with a greater feeling for the rule itself who enjoy discipline, loathe anything indeterminate, and wish their lives to follow a rigid programme and their conduct to be constantly controlled by inflexible rules.

This is another reason for us to be wary of the suggestions of our personal consciousness. It can easily be imagined what would be the dangers attendant upon an individual subjective method that reduced morality to the feelings that this or that person might entertain of it. There are

almost always essential aspects of morality that we either do not feel at all or feel only weakly.

Having seen that these two characteristics of moral life occur wherever moral facts are found, can we say that they are on the same level? Is there one that is primary and from which the other derives? Could we, for instance, find that the idea of obligation derives from that of a desirable end? I received a letter posing this question and suggesting this hypothesis. I refuse absolutely to admit it. I will not go into all the reasons against it; since at all times, as far as we can go, we find the two characteristics co-existing, there is no objective reason for us to admit even a logical priority of one over the other. Even from the dialectical and theoretical point of view, if we have no duty except in so far as duty is desirable, the very notion of duty disappears. It is impossible to derive obligation from the desirable, since the specific characteristic of obligation is to a certain extent the violation of desire. It is as impossible to derive duty from good (or inversely) as it is to derive altruism from egoism.

It has been argued that the idea of performing an act for any other reason than its intrinsic content is incomprehensible. First of all, we are no more justified in the study of moral phenomena than in the study of psychic and other phenomena in rejecting an apparent fact simply because we are unable to give an immediate satisfactory explanation of it. To explain the characteristic of obligation in rules it is sufficient to establish the notion of moral authority. A moral authority that is legitimate in the eyes of reason receives our submission because it is moral authority and we respect its discipline. Few, I think, will deny all moral authority. That the idea of it is badly analysed is no reason for denying its existence and necessity. Later we shall see, in fact, to what observable reality this idea corresponds.

Let us then be wary of artificially simplifying moral reality. On the contrary, let us keep our attention upon the two aspects that we have noted and not become



involved with their apparent contradictions. These contradictions will shortly be resolved.

Further, there is another idea that presents the same duality: the idea of the *sacred*. The sacred object inspires us, if not with fear, at least with respect that keeps us at a distance; at the same time it is an object of love and aspiration that we are drawn towards. Here, then, is a dual sentiment which seems to be self-contradictory but does not for all that cease to be real.

The human personality presents a notable example of this apparent duality which we have just distinguished. On the one hand, it inspires us with a religious respect that keeps us at some distance. Any encroachment upon the legitimate sphere of action of our fellow beings we regard as a sacrilege. It is, as it were, sacrosanct and thus apart. But at the same time human personality is the outstanding object of our sympathy and we endeavour to develop it. It is an ideal to be realized in ourselves as completely as possible.

If I compare the idea of the sacred with that of the moral, it is not merely in order to draw an interesting analogy. It is because it is very difficult to understand moral life if we do not relate it to religious life. For centuries morals and religion have been intimately linked and even completely fused. Even today one is bound to recognize this close association in the majority of minds. It is apparent that moral life has not been, and never will be, able to shed all the characteristics that it holds in common with religion. When two orders of facts have been so closely linked, when there has been between them so close a relationship for so long a time, it is impossible for them to be dissociated and become distinct. For this to happen they would have to undergo a complete transformation and so change their nature. There must, then, be morality in religion and elements of the religious in morality. In fact, present moral life abounds in the religious. These religious elements do not remain unchanged and it is certain that the religious

sentiment of morality tends to become quite a different thing from that of theology. The characteristic of the sacred in morality does not lift it above criticism, as it does religion. But this is only a difference of degree and scarcely recognized by the majority even today. We may cite as proof the repugnance shown to any attempt to apply to morality the ordinary methods of science.

It would seem that in presuming to think of it and study it with the procedures of profane science we are *profaning* morality itself and threatening its dignity. Our contemporaries do not willingly admit that moral reality may, with all other realities, be submitted to discussion.

## 2

I have now reached the second part of my exposition, and it is here most of all that I feel certain scruples. Having determined the characteristics of moral reality, I wish to attempt some explanation of them.

The only scientific way of proceeding would be to make a list of moral rules, to classify and consider them one by one, and to try to explain the most important ones by seeking their causes and the functions they fulfil and have fulfilled. In this way we could progress to some idea of the general causes upon which depend those essential characteristics that they have in common. I have followed this method in my teaching. Being unable to follow that path here, I shall have to proceed dialectically and to admit a certain number of postulates without as rigorous a demonstration of them as I should like.

I begin with my first postulate, which is as follows: We have no duties except in relation to thinking minds; all our duties are oriented in terms of moral and thinking beings. The problem is: Who are these thinking subjects? An act can have only two ends:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The schema of this argument is borrowed from Wundt's *Ethik*.



- (i) The individual self.
- (ii) Beings other than myself.

Let us see first of all whether acts oriented purely in terms of myself can have a moral character. To answer this question we must examine the communal moral conscience. This method is no doubt uncertain and hazardous, since we run the risk of interpreting its answer according to our own wishes. However, honestly employed, the method is not unfruitful. First of all, probably no one will deny that no act has ever been regarded as moral which is *oriented exclusively* to the preservation of the individual. No doubt such an act becomes moral if I save myself for my family or my country, but if I save myself entirely for myself my conduct in the eyes of common opinion lacks moral value.

What then of acts directed not towards self-preservation but towards self-improvement? Again, if I try to improve myself, not from individual or even aesthetic interests but in order that this development may have a useful effect on others, then such acts will have moral value. If I try to develop my intelligence and my faculties only in order to shine and succeed my act will never be considered as moral.

Thus I, as an individual, cannot be the end of my moral conduct. Could others who, like me, are also individuals fulfil this rôle any better? If by preserving or developing my individual being as such I perform no moral act, in what way has the individuality of another any priority over mine? If of himself the agent can in no way confer a moral character on acts of which he himself is the object, why should another individual, his equal, enjoy a privilege that he himself does not possess? Between them there can be only differences of degree, which do not suffice to explain the difference in nature between *moral* and *amoral* conduct. If morality gives to the one what it refuses to the other it would rest upon a fundamental contradiction which is inadmissible not only for logical but also for practical reasons. It is difficult to see how such contradictory senti-

ments would not in the course of time have become aware of their contradiction. In any case it would be a singularly uncertain morality that could not be apprehended without revealing such an inconsistency.

If another individual, acting as the object of my conduct, cannot endow it with a moral character, this is no less the case when not one but several individuals are involved. If each separate individual is incapable of communicating moral value to conduct—that is to say, if he has not in himself a moral value—any number of individuals will be no more capable.

I do not maintain that opinion always refuses any moral value to acts directed towards others and towards myself. Particularly as regards the former, this would be contrary to the evidence. I do maintain that when they have a moral value they are oriented towards a higher end than the individual himself or other individuals. The morality which is recognized in them must derive from a higher source. This is apparent in acts of which I am both agent and object. If we are consistent, the same evidence applies to acts of which I am the agent but of which others are the object.

If we cannot be bound by duty except to conscious beings and we have eliminated the individual, there remains as the only other possible object of moral activity the *sui generis* collective being formed by the plurality of individuals associated to form a group. Further, the collective personality must be thought of as something other than the totality of individuals that compose it. If it were only the sum it could have no greater moral value than its component parts, which in themselves have none. We arrive then at the conclusion that if a morality, or system of obligations and duties, exists, society is a moral being qualitatively different from the individuals it comprises and from the aggregation from which it derives. The similarity between this argument and that of Kant in favour of the existence of God will be noted. Kant postulates God, since without this hypothesis



morality is unintelligible. We postulate a society specifically distinct from individuals, since otherwise morality has no object and duty no roots. Let us add that this postulate is easily verified by experience. Although I have often treated this question in my books, it would be easy to give reasons other than those already advanced in defence of this conception.

This argument may be reduced to a number of very simple propositions. We return to the admission of the fact that, according to common opinion, morality begins at the same point at which disinterestedness and devotion also begin. Disinterestedness becomes meaningful only when its object has a higher moral value than we have as individuals. In the world of experience I know of only one being that possesses a richer and more complex moral reality than our own, and that is the collective being. I am mistaken; there is another being which could play the same part, and that is the Divinity. Between God and society lies the choice. I shall not examine here the reasons that may be advanced in favour of either solution, both of which are coherent. I can only add that I myself am quite indifferent to this choice, since I see in the Divinity only society transfigured and symbolically expressed.

Morality begins with life in the group, since it is only there that disinterestedness and devotion become meaningful. I speak of the life of the group generally; there are different groups—the family, the corporation, the city, the nation and the international group. A hierarchy could be established for these various groups and one would find corresponding degrees of moral activity according to the field concerned, according to the size of the society, its degree of complexity and specialization. At the moment there is little point in discussing these problems. It is enough that we mark the point where the domain of moral life appears to begin, without introducing a differentiation. Moral life begins with membership of a group, however small the group may be.

We can see now how certain acts that we have left on one side during our discussion can take on, indirectly, a moral character. The interests of others can have, we noted, no more intrinsic moral value than our own. In so far, however, as another participates in the life of the group and in so far as he is a member of the collectivity to which we are attached, he tends to take on some of its dignity and he becomes an object of our affection and interest. To be a member of the society is, as we shall shortly show, to be bound to the social ideal. There is a little of this ideal in each one of us. It is then natural that each individual participates to some extent in the religious aspect which this ideal inspires. Attachment to a group implies a necessary, if indirect, attachment to individuals. When the social ideal is a particular form of the ideal of humanity, when the type of citizen blends to a great extent with the generic type of man, it is to man as such that we find ourselves bound. This explains the moral character which is attributed to feelings of sympathy between individuals and the acts which they inspire. It is not that they themselves constitute the intrinsic elements of the moral temperament, but they are so closely—if indirectly—bound to the most essential moral attitudes that we may take their absence as very probably an index of a lesser morality. When one loves one's country or humanity one cannot see one's fellows suffer without suffering oneself and without feeling a desire to help them. But what binds us morally to others is nothing intrinsic in their empirical individuality; it is the superior end of which they are the servants and instruments.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the same way the devotion of a scientist to his work can take on, indirectly, a moral character. The search for truth is not in itself a moral occupation; all depends upon the reason for which it is sought. It is only really and fully moral when science is revered for its beneficial effects upon society and humanity. On the other hand, the mental process involved in the self-sacrifice of the scientist impassioned by his work resembles so closely those involved in true moral self-sacrifice that it must to a certain extent participate in the feelings which the latter inspire. It is tinged with morality.



We are now in a position to understand how it is that there are rules called moral rules which we must obey because they command and which direct our actions to ends that transcend us while at the same time appearing desirable.

We have just seen that society is the end of all moral activity. Now (i) while it transcends the individual it is immanent in him; (ii) it has all the characteristics of a moral authority that imposes respect.

(i) Society transcends the individual's consciousness. It surpasses him materially because it is a result of the coalition of all the individual forces. By itself this material superiority would not be enough. The universe also surpasses the individual materially, but is not on that account called moral. Society is something more than a material power; it is a moral power. It surpasses us physically, materially and morally. Civilization is the result of the co-operation of men in association through successive generations; it is essentially a social product. Society made it, preserves it and transmits it to individuals. Civilization is the assembly of all the things to which we attach the highest price; it is the congregation of the highest human values. Because it is at once the source and the guardian of civilization, the channel by which it reaches us, society appears to be an infinitely richer and higher reality than our own. It is a reality from which everything that matters to us flows. Nevertheless it surpasses us in every way, since we can receive from this storehouse of intellectual and moral riches, of which it is the guardian, at most a few fragments only. The more we advance in time, the more complex and immense does our civilization become, and consequently the more does it transcend the individual consciousness and the smaller does the individual feel in relation to it. Each of the members of an Australian tribe carries in himself the integrated whole of his civilization, but of our present civilization each one of us can only succeed in integrating a small part.

However small it may be, we do nevertheless always

integrate in ourselves a part, and thus while society transcends us it is immanent in us and we feel it as such. While it surpasses us it is within us, since it can only exist by and through us. It is ourselves or, rather, the best part of us, since a man is only a man to the degree that he is civilized. That which makes us real human beings is the amount that we manage to assimilate of this assembly of ideas, beliefs and precepts for conduct that we call civilization. As Rousseau showed long ago: deprive man of all that society has given him and he is reduced to his sensations. He becomes a being more or less indistinct from an animal. Without language, essentially a social thing, general or abstract ideas are practically impossible, as are all the higher mental functions. Left to himself the individual would become dependent upon physical forces. If he has been able to escape, to free himself, to develop a personality, it is because he has been able to shelter under a *sui generis* force; an intense force since it results from the coalition of all the individual forces, but an intelligent and moral force capable, consequently, of neutralizing the blind and amoral forces of nature. This is the collective force. The theoretician may demonstrate that man has the right to liberty, but, whatever the value of these demonstrations, it is certain that this liberty can become a reality only in and through society.

Thus to love society is to love both something beyond us and something in ourselves. We could not wish to be free of society without wishing to finish our existence as men. I do not know whether civilization has brought us more happiness, and it is of no consequence; what is certain is that from the moment that we are civilized we can only renounce civilization by renouncing ourselves. The only question that a man can ask is not whether he can live outside society, but in what society he wishes to live. I recognize very willingly the right of the individual to live in the society of his choice, provided that he is not bound to the society of his birth by previously contracted duties.



Thus without any difficulty we have explained how society constitutes an end that surpasses us and at the same time appears to us as good and desirable, since it is bound up in the very fibres of our being. Consequently society has the essential characteristics that we have stipulated for moral ends.

(ii) But at the same time it is a moral authority; this follows from what we have already said. What is a moral authority if not the characteristic which we attribute to a real or ideal being that we conceive of as constituting a moral power superior to our own? The characteristic of all moral authority is that it imposes respect; because of this respect our will defers to its imperatives. Society, then, has all that is necessary for the transference to certain rules of conduct of that same imperative which is distinctive of moral obligation.

It remains for us now to see whether *in fact* moral rules derive from this source the authority which makes them appear to us as obligatory. As I said at first, it is impossible for me to examine this question here. All that I can say is that up to the present I have not found in my researches a single moral rule that is not the product of particular social factors. I wait for one which seems to demand another explanation to be drawn to my attention. The fact, today incontestably established, that all moral systems practised by peoples are a function of the social organization of these peoples, are bound to their social structures and vary with them, is surely proof enough. At one time, it is true, this diversity of moral systems was attributed to the ignorance or blindness of men. History has established that, except in abnormal cases, each society has in the main a morality suited to it, and that any other would not only be impossible but also fatal to the society which attempted to follow it. Individual morality, despite what is often maintained, does not escape this law, for it is social to the highest degree. What it makes us try to realize is the ideal man as the society conceives him, and each society con-

ceives its ideal in its own image. The Roman or the Athenian ideals were closely related to the particular organizations of these two cities. This ideal type which each society demands that its members realize is the keystone of the whole social system and gives it its unity.

At the same time that we understand the two characteristics of moral facts and what these characteristics express, we also understand what constitutes their unity; they are only two aspects of one and the same reality, the collective reality. Society commands us because it is exterior and superior to us; the moral distance between it and us makes it an authority before which our will defers. But as, on the other hand, it is within us and *is* us, we love and desire it, albeit with a *sui generis* desire since, whatever we do, society can never be ours in more than a part and dominates us infinitely. Finally, from the same point of view, we can understand the sacred character which marks and has always marked moral things, the religious character without which no ethic has ever existed.

I should like to follow this up with the observation that things have no value in themselves. This is a truth which also applies in the economic sphere. The old theory of economics, according to which there were objective values inherent in things and independent of our minds, has no longer many defenders today. Values are the product of opinion; things have no value except in relation to states of mind.

At the time that manual labour was morally despised the value that was attributed to it, which expressed itself in the rate of payment, was lower than that which we nowadays recognize. One could multiply these examples.

As with economic things so with moral. When we say that they are sacred we mean that they have a value incommensurable with other human values. That which is sacred is that which is set apart, that which has nothing in common with the profane. It is evident that moral facts have this character. Never do we admit that a moral value



can be expressed in terms of economic values—I would go so far as to say temporal values. We can, on occasion, excuse a man who, in the way of human weakness, neglects his duty in order to save his life; we dare never say that this sacrifice is legitimate and merits praise. This in spite of the fact that life is, of all amoral and profane goods, the one to which we cling hardest, since it is the necessary condition of the rest.

But in order that moral facts may be beyond comparison it is necessary that the sentiments that determine their value should have the same character. It is necessary that they also should be above comparison with other human desires. They must have a prestige and an energy that distinguishes them from among the other movements of our sensibility. The collective sentiments fulfil this condition. Precisely because they are the echo within us of the great voice of the collective, they speak in our consciences with a tone quite different from that of purely individual sentiments. They speak to us from a higher level and by reason of their origin they have a force and an ascendancy peculiarly their own. One can see how it is that the objects to which these sentiments attach themselves participate in the same prestige. They are set apart and elevated above other things by all the distance that separates the two different states of mind.

From this derives the characteristic sacredness with which the human being is now invested. This character is not inherent. Analyse man as he appears to empirical analysis and nothing will be found that suggests this sanctity; man is a temporal being. But under the effect of causes which it is not our business to study here the human being is becoming the pivot of social conscience among European peoples and has acquired an incomparable value. It is society that has consecrated him. Man has no innate right to this aura that surrounds and protects him against sacrilegious trespass. It is merely the way in which society thinks of him, the high esteem that it has of him at the

moment, projected and objectified. Thus very far from there being the antagonism between the individual and society which is often claimed, moral individualism, the cult of the individual, is in fact the product of society itself. It is society that instituted it and made of man the god whose servant it is.

This outline may be helpful in understanding society, which for me is the source and the end of morality. I have often been accused of giving moral activity a very mediocre objective as well as a limited arena. Certainly if one sees in society only the group of individuals that compose it and their dwelling-place, the accusation is justified without difficulty. But society is different; it is above all a composition of ideas, beliefs and sentiments of all sorts which realize themselves through individuals. Foremost of these ideas is the moral ideal which is its principal *raison d'être*. To love one's society is to love this ideal, and one loves it so that one would rather see society disappear as a material entity than renounce the ideal which it embodies. Society is the field of an intense intellectual and moral life with a wide range of influence. From the actions and reactions between its individuals arises an entirely new mental life which lifts our minds into a world of which we could have not the faintest idea had we lived in isolation. This we observe best at those signal epochs of crisis when some great collective movement seizes us, lifts us above ourselves, and transfigures us. If, in the course of ordinary life, we feel its action less keenly because it is less violent and sharp, it does not for that reason cease to be real.

## 3

In the third part of my programme I shall be very brief. I have inserted it so that we can discuss an objection which is often made and which, I am sure, rests upon a misunderstanding.

It has been said that to see morality in this manner is to preclude all possibility of judging it. If morality is the



product of the collective, it necessarily imposes itself upon the individual, who is in no position to question it whatever form it may take, and must accept it passively. We are thus condemned to follow opinion without ever having the right to rebel against its dictates.

But here, as elsewhere, the science of reality puts us in a position to modify the real and to direct it. The science of moral opinion furnishes us with the means of judging it and the need of rectifying it. I will give a few examples of these possible rectifications.

First of all, it is possible that, as a result of some passing upheaval, some fundamental moral principle is hidden for a time from the public conscience which, not feeling it, denies that it is there (theoretically and explicitly, or practically and in action; it does not matter). The science of morals can appeal from this temporarily troubled moral condition to that which pre-existed in what we may call a chronic condition. By opposing the permanence with which this principle was held for so long with the acute and temporary nature of the crisis during which it has been in abeyance one can, in the name of science, awaken rational doubts as to the legitimacy of its negation. One can always by the same method do more, and show how this principle is related to such or such essential and ever-present conditions of our social organization and collective mentality; how, in fact, one cannot ignore it without at the same time misunderstanding the conditions by which the collective, and hence the individual, exists. Let us suppose that at a given time the society as a whole tends to lose sight of the sanctity of individual rights. Could we not correct it with authority by reminding it that the rights of the individual are so closely bound to the structure of the great European societies and our whole mentality that to deny them, under the pretext of social interests, is to deny the most essential interests of society itself?

It is equally possible that, apart from the present existing order of morality maintained by the forces of tradition,

new tendencies more or less conscious of themselves are appearing. The science of morals allows us to take up a position between these two divergent moralities, the one now existing and the one in the process of becoming. It teaches us, for example, that the first is related to an order which has disappeared or is disappearing, and that the new ideas on the contrary are related to recent changes in the conditions of collective existence and are made necessary by these changes. Our science may help us to render these ideas more precise and to direct them, etc.

We are not then obliged to bend our heads under the force of moral opinion. We can even in certain cases feel ourselves justified in rebelling against it. It may, in fact, happen that, for one of the reasons just indicated, we shall feel it our duty to combat moral ideas that we know to be out of date and nothing more than survivals. The best way of doing this may appear to be the denial of these ideas, not only theoretically but also in action. No doubt here I am touching on points of conscience that are always delicate, and I do not intend to resolve the problem in a word. I wish merely to indicate that the method I have laid down permits the posing of these problems.

But in any case we cannot aspire to a morality other than that which is related to the state of our society. We have here an objective standard with which to compare our evaluations. The reason which is the judge on these matters is not the individual reason, subject as it is to all sorts of private aspirations and personal preferences, but the reason supported by the methodical observation of a given reality, the social reality. It is from society and not from the individual that morality derives. No doubt we shall often be bound to take sides on these questions without waiting for our science to be sufficiently advanced to guide us; the necessity for action often forces us to precede science. In such cases we do what we can; we replace methodical science, in the circumstances impossible, by a more summary and premature science which looks in moments of



doubt to the inspirations of sensibility. I am not trying to suggest that this new-born science is already in a condition to act as the sovereign guide of conduct. All I want to show here is that this science, far from preventing us from evaluating reality, gives us the means by which we can arrive at *reasoned* evaluations.

Such then—as far as it can be outlined in the course of a lecture—is the general conception of moral facts to which research on this subject for a little over twenty years has led me. It has been judged as narrow; I hope that better understanding will not see it as such. We have seen, on the contrary, that without making itself systematically eclectic it finds room for points of view which ordinarily appear completely opposed. I wish to stress the fact that this science permits the empirical study of moral facts, while at the same time not destroying the *sui generis* religious character which is inherent in them and which distinguishes them from all other human phenomena. Thus we escape from utilitarian empiricism which, while claiming to offer a rational explanation of morality, denies its specific characteristics and reduces its fundamental ideas to those of economic techniques, as also from Kantian *a priori*ism, which gives a fairly faithful analysis of the nature of morality but which describes more than it explains. We recognize the notion of duty, but for experimental reasons and without rejecting the valuable aspect of eudemonism. The fact of the matter is this: the different points of view which among moralists are in opposition are mutually exclusive only in the abstract. In fact they only express different aspects of a complex reality, and consequently all will be found in their various places when one brings one's mind to bear on this reality which one wishes to understand in its complexity.

### III

#### REPLIES TO OBJECTIONS<sup>1</sup>

##### I. THE CONDITION OF SOCIETY AND THE CONDITION OF SOCIAL OPINION

**I**HAVE said that the point of departure for our predictions regarding the future of morality should be not social opinion but the state of the society, either as it actually exists or as it can be said to be becoming by virtue of the inevitable causes that govern its evolution. What we have to discover is society as it is, not society as it sees itself, which may produce an erroneous picture. For example, the problem nowadays is to discover what should be the fate of morality in a society like our own, characterized by a growing concentration and unification, by the increase of possibilities of communication which bring into relation the different parts and further the absorption of local life in the general, by the rise of powerful industries, and the development of individualism which accompanies this centralization of all the social forces, etc.

The confused social aspirations which make themselves heard on all sides express the way in which society, or rather its different parts, sees the actual condition and the way in which it is to be faced. They have no other value. Certainly they are valuable sources of information in that they convey some part of the underlying social reality, but

<sup>1</sup> Part of the Discussion on 27 March, 1906, which followed Durkheim's address to the *Société Française de Philosophie* on 11 February. We have retained only the longer of Durkheim's replies and those which seem to throw more light on his theory of a science of morality. The sub-titles are ours. The first extract is in answer to an observation by M. Parodi.