# The Rules of Sociological Method

# Preface

We are so little accustomed to treating social facts scientifically that certain propositions contained in this book may well surprise the reader. However, if a science of societies exists, one must certainly not expect it to consist of a mere paraphrase of traditional prejudices. It should rather cause us to see things in a different way from the ordinary man, for the purpose of any science is to make discoveries, and all such discoveries more or less upset accepted opinions. Thus unless in sociology one ascribes to common sense an authority that it has not now commanded for a long time in the other sciences – and it is not clear from where that might be derived – the scholar must determinedly resolve not to be intimidated by the results to which his investigations may lead, provided that they have been methodically carried out. If the search for paradox is the mark of the sophist, to flee from it when the facts demand it is that of a mind that possesses neither courage nor faith in science.

Unfortunately it is easier to accept this rule in principle or theory than to apply it consistently. We are still too used to deciding all such questions according to the promptings of common sense to exclude the latter easily from sociological discussion. Whilst we believe ourselves to be emancipated from it, it imposes its judgements upon us unawares. Only sustained and special practice can prevent such shortcomings. We would ask our reader not to lose sight of this. His mind should always be conscious that the modes of thought with which he is most familiar are adverse, rather than favourable, to the scientific study of social phenomena, so that he must consequently be on his guard against first impressions. If he yields to these without resistance he may well have judged our work

without having understood us. He might, for example, charge us with seeking to justify crime, on the specious grounds that we treat it as a phenomenon of normal sociology. Yet such an objection would be childish. For if it is normal for crimes to occur in every society, it is no less normal for them to be punished. The institution of a system of repression is as universal a fact as the existence of criminality, and one no less indispensable to the collective well-being. An absence of crime would require eliminating the differences between individual consciences to a degree which, for reasons set out later, is neither possible nor desirable. Yet for a repressive system not to exist there would have to be an absence of moral homogeneity incompatible with the existence of society. Yet, proceeding from the fact that crime is both abhorred and abhorrent, common sense mistakenly concludes that it could not die out swiftly enough. With customary naivety it cannot conceive that something repugnant may nevertheless have a useful reason for existing. Nevertheless, here there is no contradiction. Has not the physical organism repugnant functions whose regular action is necessary to the health of the individual? Do we not shrink from suffering? Yet a being to whom it was unknown would be a monster. The normality of something and the sentiments of revulsion that it inspires may even be closely joined. If pain is a normal fact, it is none the less disliked; if crime is normal, it is none the less detested.[1] Thus our method is by no means revolutionary. In one sense it is even essentially conservative, since it treats social facts as things whose nature, however flexible and malleable it may be, is still not modifiable at will. How much more dangerous is the doctrine which sees in them the mere resultant of mental combinations which a simple dialectic artifice can, in a trice, upset from top to bottom!

Likewise, because we are accustomed to representing social life as the logical development of ideal concepts, a method which makes collective evolution dependent on objective conditions, spatially delineated, may perhaps be condemned as rough and ready, and we may even be considered materialist. However, we might more accurately claim to be the opposite. Does not in fact the essence of spiritualism depend upon the idea that psychical phenomena cannot be derived directly from organic ones? Our method is in part only an application of this principle to social facts. Just as spiritualists separate the psychological from the biological domain, so we also separate the psychological domain

from the social one; like them, we refuse to explain the more complex in terms of the more simple. Yet, to tell the truth, neither designation fits us precisely: the only one we accept is that of *rationalist*. Indeed our main objective is to extend the scope of scientific rationalism to cover human behaviour by demonstrating that, in the light of the past, it is capable of being reduced to relationships of cause and effect, which, by an operation no less rational, can then be transformed into rules of action for the future. What has been termed our positivism is merely a consequence of this rationalism.[2] One will not be tempted to go beyond the facts, either in order to account for them or to guide the direction in which they might go, save to the extent that one believes them to be irrational. If they are wholly intelligible, they suffice for both science and practice; for science, because there is then no motive for seeking outside them the reasons why they exist; for practice, because their usefulness is one of these reasons. It therefore seems to us, particularly in this time of resurgent mysticism, that such an undertaking can and should be greeted without apprehension and indeed with sympathy by all those who, although they part company with us on certain points, share our faith in the future of reason.

**Notes**

1. The objection may be made that, if health contains some repugnant elements, how can it be presented, as we do later, as the immediate object of behaviour? But there is no contradiction here. Although it may be harmful in some of its consequences, it is common for a thing to be, through others, useful or even vital to life. If the evil effects which arise from it are regularly counteracted by an opposing influence, it is in fact useful without being harmful. It nevertheless remains repugnant, for in itself it does not cease to constitute a possible danger, one which is only exorcised by the action of a hostile force. Such is the case with crime. The wrong that it inflicts upon society is nullified by the punishment, if this functions regularly. It therefore follows that, without engendering the evil that it implies, it sustains, as we shall see, positive relationships, together with the basic conditions of social life. But since, so to speak, it is rendered harmless despite itself, the sentiments of revulsion that it gives rise to are none the less well founded.
2. Namely, it must not be confused with the positive metaphysics of Comte and Spencer.

# Preface to the Second Edition

When this book first appeared, it aroused some fairly lively controversy. Current ideas, as if put out of joint, at first offered such vigorous resistance that it was for a while almost impossible for us to gain a hearing. On the very points about which we had expressed ourselves most explicitly, views were gratuitously ascribed to us which lacked anything in common with our own and, by refuting them, it was believed that we were also refuted. Whereas we had repeatedly declared that consciousness, both individual and social, did not signify for us anything substantial, but merely a collection of phenomena *sui generis*, more or less systematised, we were accused of realism and ontological thinking. While we had expressly stated and reiterated in every way possible that social life was made up entirely of representations, we were accused of eliminating from sociology the element of mind. Critics even went so far as to revive against us ways of argument that one might well think had definitively disappeared. In fact, certain opinions were imputed to us that we had not put forward, on the pretence that they were 'in conformity with our principles'. Yet experience has demonstrated all the dangers of this method which, by allowing one to construct in arbitrary fashion the systems under discussion, also allows one to triumph without difficulty over them.

We do not think that we are deluding ourselves when we assert that, since then, resistance has progressively weakened. More than one proposition we advanced is doubtless still under attack. But we cannot be surprised or complain about this opposition, which is salutary because it is indeed very apparent that our postulates are destined to be revised in the future. Summarising, as they do, an

individual practice that is inevitably restricted, they must necessarily evolve as wider and deeper experience of social reality is gained. Furthermore, as regards methods, not one can ever be used that is not provisional, for they change as science progresses. Nevertheless, during recent years, in spite of opposition, the cause of a sociology that is objective, specific and methodical has continually gained ground. The founding of the *Année sociologique* has certainly contributed much to this result. Since it embraces at one and the same time the whole field of the science, the *Année,* better than any more specialised publication, has been able to impart a feeling of what sociology must and can become. Thus it has made plain that sociology is not condemned to remain a branch of general philosophy and that, moreover, it can come to grips in detail with facts without degenerating into pure erudition. And so we cannot pay tribute enough to the enthusiasm and devotion of our colleagues; it is thanks to them that this demonstration by facts could be attempted and can continue.

However, no matter how real the progress made, one cannot deny that past misunderstandings and confusion have not been entirely dispelled. This is why we should like to seize the opportunity of this second edition to put forward additional explanations to those already stated, to reply to certain criticisms and to give fresh clarification of certain points.

## I

The proposition which states that social facts must be treated as things – the proposition which is at the very basis of our method – is among those which have stirred up the most opposition. It was deemed paradoxical and scandalous for us to assimilate to the realities of the external world those of the social world. This was singularly to misunderstand the meaning and effect of this assimilation, the object of which was not to reduce the higher forms of being to the level of lower ones but, on the contrary, to claim for the former a degree of reality at least equal to that which everyone accords to the latter. Indeed, we do not say that social facts are material things, but that they are things just as are material things, although in a different way.

What indeed is a thing? The thing stands in opposition to the

idea, just as what is known from the outside stands in opposition to what is known from the inside. A thing is any object of knowledge which is not naturally penetrable by the understanding. It is all that which we cannot conceptualise adequately as an idea by the simple process of intellectual analysis. It is all that which the mind cannot understand without going outside itself, proceeding progressively by way of observation and experimentation from those features which are the most external and the most immediately accessible to those which are the least visible and the most profound. To treat facts of a certain order as things is therefore not to place them in this or that category of reality; it is to observe towards them a certain attitude of mind. It is to embark upon the study of them by adopting the principle that one is entirely ignorant of what they are, that their characteristic properties, like the unknown causes upon which they depend, cannot be discovered by even the most careful form of introspection.

The terms being so defined, our proposition, far from being a paradox, might almost pass for a truism if it were not too often still unrecognised in those sciences which deal with man, and above all in sociology. Indeed, in this sense it may be said that any object of knowledge is a thing, except perhaps for mathematical objects. Regarding the latter, since we construct them ourselves, from the most simple to the most complex, it is enough to look within ourselves and to analyse internally the mental process from which they arise, in order to know what they are. But as soon as we consider facts *per se*, when we undertake to make a science of them, they are of necessity unknowns for us, *things* of which we are ignorant, for the representations that we have been able to make of them in the course of our lives, since they have been made without method and uncritically, lack any scientific value and must be discarded. The facts of individual psychology themselves are of this nature and must be considered in this light. Indeed, although by definition they are internal to ourselves, the consciousness that we have of them reveals to us neither their inmost character nor their origin. Consciousness allows us to know them well up to a certain point, but only in the same way as our senses make us aware of heat or light, sound or electricity. It gives us muddled impressions of them, fleeting and subjective, but provides no clear, distinct notions or explanatory concepts. This is precisely why during this century an objective psychology has been founded

whose fundamental rule is to study mental facts from the outside, namely as things. This should be even more the case for social facts, for consciousness cannot be more capable of knowing them than of knowing its own existence. [1] It will be objected that, since they have been wrought by us, we have only to become conscious of ourselves to know what we have put into them and how we shaped them. Firstly, however, most social institutions have been handed down to us already fashioned by previous generations; we have had no part in their shaping; consequently it is not by searching within ourselves that we can uncover the causes which have given rise to them. Furthermore, even if we have played a part in producing them, we can hardly glimpse, save in the most confused and often even the most imprecise way, the real reasons which have impelled us to act, or the nature of our action. Already, even regarding merely the steps we have taken personally, we know very inaccurately the relatively simple motives that govern us. We believe ourselves disinterested, whereas our actions are egoistic; we think that we are commanded by hatred whereas we are giving way to love, that we are obedient to reason whereas we are the slaves of irrational prejudices, etc. How therefore could we possess the ability to discern more clearly the causes, of a different order of complexity, which inspire the measures taken by the collectivity? For at the very least each individual shares in only an infinitesimally small part of them; we have a host of fellow-fashioners, and what is occurring in their different consciousnesses eludes us.

Thus our rule implies no metaphysical conception, no speculation about the innermost depth of being. What it demands is that the sociologist should assume the state of mind of physicists, chemists and physiologists when they venture into an as yet unexplored area of their scientific field. As the sociologist penetrates into the social world he should be conscious that he is penetrating into the unknown. He must feel himself in the presence of facts governed by laws as unsuspected as those of life before the science of biology was evolved. He must hold himself ready to make discoveries which will surprise and disconcert him. Yet sociology is far from having arrived at this degree of intellectual maturity. While the scientist who studies physical nature feels very keenly the resistances that it proffers, ones which he has great difficulty in overcoming, it really seems as if the sociologist

operates among things immediately clear to the mind, so great is the ease with which he seems to resolve the most obscure questions. In the present state of the discipline, we do not really know the nature of the principal social institutions, such as the state or the family, property rights or contract, punishment and responsibility. We are virtually ignorant of the causes upon which they depend, the functions they fulfil, and their laws of evolution. It is as if, on certain points, we are only just beginning to perceive a few glimmers of light. Yet is suffices to glance through works of sociology to see how rare is any awareness of this ignorance and these difficulties. Not only is it deemed mandatory to dogmatise about every kind of problem at once, but it is believed that one is capable, in a few pages or sentences, of penetrating to the inmost essence of the most complex phenomena. This means that such theories express, not the facts, which could not be so swiftly fathomed, but the preconceptions of the author before he began his research. Doubtless the idea that we form of collective practices, of what they are, or what they should be, is a factor in their development. But this idea itself is a fact which, in order to be properly established, needs to be studied from the outside. For it is important to know not the way in which a particular thinker individually represents a particular institution, but the conception that the group has of it. This conception is indeed the only socially effective one. But it cannot be known through mere inner observation, since it is not wholly and entirely within any one of us; one must therefore find some external signs which make it apparent. Furthermore, it did not arise from nothing: it is itself the result of external causes which must be known in order to be able to appreciate its future role. Thus, no matter what one does, it is always to the same method that one must return.

## II

Another proposition has been no less hotly disputed than the previous one. It is the one which presents social phenomena as external to individuals. Today it is fairly willingly accepted that the facts of individual life and those of collective life are to some extent different in nature. It can be stated that agreement, although not unaminous but at least very widespread, is beginning

to be reached on this point. There are now hardly any sociologists who deny to sociology any kind of specificity. Yet since society comprises only individuals[2] it seems in accordance with common sense that social life can have no other substratum than the individual consciousness. Otherwise it would seem suspended in the air, floating in the void.

Yet what is so readily deemed unacceptable for social facts is freely admitted for other domains of nature. Whenever elements of any kind combine, by virtue of this combination they give rise to new phenomena. One is therefore forced to conceive of these phenomena as residing, not in the elements, but in the entity formed by the union of these elements. The living cell contains nothing save chemical particles, just as society is made up of nothing except individuals. Yet it is very clearly impossible for the characteristic phenomena of life to reside in atoms of hydrogen, oxygen, carbon and nitrogen. For how could living movements arise from amidst non-living elements? Furthermore, how would biological properties be allocated amongst these elements? They could not be found equally in them all, since they are not of the same nature: carbon is not nitrogen and thus cannot possess the same properties or play the same part. It is no less unacceptable for every facet of life, for each of its main characteristics, to be incorporated in a distinct group of atoms. Life cannot be split up in this fashion. It is one, and consequently cannot be located save in the living substance in its entirety. It is in the whole and not in the parts. It is not the non-living particles of the cell which feed themselves and reproduce – in a word, which live; it is the cell itself and it alone. And what we maintain regarding life could be reaffirmed for every possible kind of synthesis. The hardness of bronze lies neither in the copper, nor in the tin, nor in the lead which have been used to form it, which are all soft or malleable bodies. The hardness arises from the mixing of them. The liquidity of water, its sustaining and other properties, are not in the two gases of which it is composed, but in the complex substance which they form by coming together.

Let us apply this principle to sociology. If, as is granted to us, this synthesis *sui generis,* which constitutes every society, gives rise to new phenomena, different from those which occur in consciousnesses in isolation, one is forced to admit that these specific facts reside in the society itself that produces them and not in its parts –

namely its members. In this sense therefore they lie outside the consciousness of individuals as such, in the same way as the distinctive features of life lie outside the chemical substances that make up a living organism. They cannot be reabsorbed into the elements without contradiction, since by definition they presume something other than what those elements contain. Thus yet another reason justifies the distinction we have established later between psychology proper – the science of the individual mind – and sociology. Social facts differ not only in quality from psychical facts; *they have a different substratum*, they do not evolve in the same environment or depend on the same conditions. This does not mean that they are not in some sense psychical, since they all consist of ways of thinking and acting. But the states of the collective consciousness are of a different nature from the states of the individual consciousness; they are representations of another kind. The mentality of groups is not that of individuals: it has its own laws. The two sciences are therefore as sharply distinct as two sciences can be, whatever relationships may otherwise exist between them.

Nevertheless, on this point it is proper to make a distinction which will perhaps shed some light on the argument.

That the *content* of social life cannot be explained by purely psychological factors, namely by states of the individual consciousness, seems to us to be as plain as can be. Indeed what collective representations express is the way in which the group thinks of itself in its relationships with the objects which affect it. Now the group is constituted differently from the individual and the things which affect it are of another kind. Representations which express neither the same subjects nor the same objects cannot depend upon the same causes. In order to understand the way in which society conceives of itself and the world that surrounds it, it is the nature of society and not that of individuals which must be considered. The symbols in which it thinks of itself alter according to what it is. If, for example, it conceives of itself as deriving from an eponymous animal, it is because it forms one of those special groups known as clans. Where the animal is replaced by a human ancestor, but one that is also mythical, it is because the clan has changed its nature. If, above local or family divinities, it imagines others on whom it fancies it is dependent, it is because the local and family groups of which it is made up tend to concentrate and

unite together, and the degree of unity presented by a pantheon of gods corresponds to the degree of unity reached at the same time in society. If it condemns certain modes of behaviour it is because they offend certain of its basic sentiments; and these sentiments relate to its constitution, just as those of the individual relate to his physical temperament and his mental make-up. Thus, even if individual psychology held no more secrets for us, it could not provide the solution to any one of these problems, since they relate to orders of facts of which it is ignorant.

But once this difference in nature is acknowledged one may ask whether individual representations and collective representations do not nevertheless resemble each other, since both are equally representations; and whether, as a consequence of these similarities, certain abstract laws might not be common to the two domains. Myths, popular legends, religious conceptions of every kind, moral beliefs, etc., express a different reality from individual reality. Yet it may be that the manner in which the two attract or repel, join together or separate, is independent of their content and relates solely to their general quality of being representations. While they have been formed in a different way they could well behave in their interrelationships as do feelings, images or ideas in the individual. Could not one, for example, believe that proximity and similarity, contrasts and logical oppositions act in the same way, no matter what things are being represented? Thus one arrives at the possibility of an entirely formal psychology which might form a common ground between individual psychology and sociology. This is maybe why certain minds feel scruples at distinguishing too sharply between the two sciences.

Strictly speaking, in our present state of knowledge, the question posed in this way can receive no categorical answer. Indeed, all that we know, moreover, about the manner in which individual ideas combine together is reduced to those few propositions, very general and very vague, which are commonly termed the laws of the association of ideas. As for the laws of the collective formation of ideas, these are even more completely unknown. Social psychology, whose task it should be to determine them is hardly more than a term which covers all kinds of general questions, various and imprecise, without any defined object. What should be done is to investigate, by comparing mythical themes, legends and popular traditions, and languages, how social representations

are attracted to or exclude each other, amalgamate with or are distinguishable from each other, etc. Now, although the problem is one that is worthy of tempting the curiosity of researchers, one can hardly say that is has been tackled. So long as some of these laws remain undiscovered it will clearly be impossible to know with certainty whether they do or do not repeat those of individual psychology.

Yet in the absence of certainty, it is at the very least probable that, if there exist resemblances between these two kinds of laws, the differences between them must be no less marked. Indeed it does not seem legitimate to claim that the matter from which the representations are formed has no effect upon the various ways in which they combine together. It is true that psychologists sometimes speak of the laws of association of ideas, as if they were the same for all the various kinds of individual representations. But nothing is less likely: images do not combine with each other as do the senses, nor concepts in the same way as images. If psychology were more advanced it would doubtless establish that each category of mental states has its own formal laws which are peculiar to it. If this is so, *a fortiori* one must expect that the corresponding laws of social thinking are specific, as is the thinking itself. Indeed, little as this order of facts has been explored, it is difficult not to be aware of this specificity. Is it not really this which makes appear so strange to us the very special manner in which religious conceptions (which are essentially collective) intermingle or, alternatively, distinguish themselves from each other, are transformed one into another, giving birth to composites which are contradictory, in contrast to the usual outcomes of our own individual thinking? If therefore, as one may presume, certain laws regarding social states of mind are in fact reminiscent of certain of those established by the psychologists, it is not because the former are simply a special case of the latter. It is rather because between the one and the other, setting on one side differences which are certainly important, there are similarities which may be adduced by abstraction, but which are as yet unknown. This means that in no way can sociology borrow purely and simply from psychology this or that proposition in order to apply it as such to social facts. But collective thinking in its entirety, in form as in substance, must be studied in itself and for itself, with a feeling for what is special to it, and one must leave to the future the task of discovering to what

extent it resembles the thought of individuals. This is even a problem which pertains rather to general philosophy and abstract logic than to the scientific study of social facts. [3]

## III

It remains for us to say a few words about the definition of social facts that we have given in our first chapter. We represent them as consisting of manners of acting or thinking, distinguishable through their special characteristic of being capable of exercising a coercive influence on the consciousness of individuals. A confusion has arisen about this which is worthy of note.

So strong has been the habit of applying to sociological matters the forms of philosophical thought that this preliminary definition has often been seen as a sort of philosophy of the social fact. It has been maintained that we were explaining social phenomena in terms of constraint, just as Tarde explains them by imitation. We harbour no such ambition, and it did not even occur to us that this could be imputed to us, so directly is it contrary to all method. What we set out to do was not to anticipate the conclusions of the discipline by stating a philosophical view, but merely to indicate how, by outward signs, it is possible to identify the facts that the science must deal with, so that the social scientist may learn how to pick out their location and not to confuse them with other things. It was intended to mark out the field of research as clearly as possible, and not for philosophy and sociology to embrace each other in some kind of comprehensive intuition. Thus we readily admit the charge that this definition does not express all aspects of the social fact and consequently that it is not the sole possible one. Indeed it is not at all inconceivable for it to be characterised in several different ways, for there is no reason why it should possess only the one distinctive property.[4] All that matters is to select the characteristic which seems to suit best the purpose one has in mind. It is even highly possible to employ several criteria at the same time, according to circumstances. We have ourselves recognised this sometimes to be necessary in sociology (see p.58). Since we are dealing with a preliminary definition, all that is necessary is that the characteristics which are being used are immediately recognisable and can be identified before the investigation begins.

Such a condition is not fulfilled in the definitions that have sometimes been advanced in opposition to our own. It has been said, for example, that the social fact is 'all that is produced in and by society', or 'that which in some way concerns and affects the group'. But one cannot know whether society is or is not the cause of a fact or if this fact has social consequences until further knowledge has already been obtained. Such definitions could not therefore serve to determine initially the object of the investigation. In order to be able to use them, the study of social facts must therefore already have been carried somewhat further, and consequently some other means previously discovered for recognising the facts in context.

At the same time as our definition has been found to be too narrow, it has also been accused of being too broad and of encompassing almost all reality. It has in fact been said that any physical environment exercises constraint upon those who are subjected to it, for, to a certain degree, they are forced to adapt themselves to it. But as between these two types of coercion, there is a world of difference separating a physical from a moral environment. The pressure exerted by one or several bodies on other bodies or even on other wills should not be confused with that which the group consciousness exercises on the consciousness of its members. What is exclusively peculiar to social constraint is that it stems not from the unyieldingness of certain patterns of molecules, but from the prestige with which certain representations are endowed. It is true that habits, whether unique to individuals or hereditary, in certain respects possess this same property. They dominate us and impose beliefs and practices upon us. But they dominate us from within, for they are wholly within each one of us. By contrast, social beliefs and practices act upon us from the outside; thus the ascendancy exerted by the former as compared with the latter is basically very different.

Furthermore, one should not be surprised that other natural phenomena present in different forms the very characteristic by which we have defined social phenomena. This similarity springs merely from the fact that both are real. For everything which is real has a definite nature which makes itself felt, with which one must reckon and which, even if one succeeds in neutralising it, is never completely overcome. And, after all, this is what is most essential in the notion of social constraint. For all that it implies is

that collective ways of acting and thinking possess a reality existing outside individuals, who, at every moment, conform to them. They are things which have their own existence. The individual encounters them when they are already completely fashioned and he cannot cause them to cease to exist or be different from what they are. Willy-nilly he is therefore obliged to take them into account; it is all the more difficult (although we do not say that it is impossible) for him to modify them because in varying degrees they partake of the material and moral supremacy that society exerts over its members. No doubt the individual plays a part in their creation. But in order for a social fact to exist, several individuals at the very least must have interacted together and the resulting combination must have given rise to some new production. As this synthesis occurs outside each one of us (since a plurality of consciousnesses are involved) it has necessarily the effect of crystallising, of instituting outside ourselves, certain modes of action and certain ways of judging which are independent of the particular individual will considered separately. As has been remarked,[5] there is one word which, provided one extends a little its normal meaning, expresses moderately well this very special kind of existence; it is that of *institution*. In fact, without doing violence to the meaning of the word, one may term an *institution* all the beliefs and modes of behaviour instituted by the collectivity; sociology can then be defined as the science of institutions, their genesis and their functioning.[6]

It seems pointless for us to revert to the other controversies that this book has given rise to, for they do not touch upon anything essential. The general orientation of the method does not depend upon the procedures preferred to classify social types or distinguish the normal from the pathological. Moreover, such objections very often arise from the fact that one has refused to admit, or not admitted without reservations, our basic principle, that of the objective reality of social facts. It is therefore upon this principle that in the end everything rests, and everything comes back to it. This why it has seemed fruitful for us to highlight it yet again, whilst distinguishing it from any secondary question. And we are certain that in attributing this paramountcy to it we remain faithful to sociological tradition: for, after all, it is from this conception that the whole of sociology has sprung. Indeed the science could not see the light of day until it had been grasped that social

phenomena, although not material things, are nevertheless real ones requiring to be studied. To arrive at thinking that it is appropriate to investigate what they are, it was necessary to understand that they exist in a way capable of definition, that their mode of existence is constant, that they possess a character independent of individual arbitrariness, yet one from which flow necessary relationships. Thus the history of sociology has been simply the long effort to define this sentiment, to give it depth, and to elaborate all the consequences that it entails. But in spite of the great progress that has been made in this direction, we shall see later in this work that there still subsist numerous vestiges of that anthropocentric postulate which, here as elsewhere, blocks the path to science. It is disagreeable for man to have to renounce the unlimited power over the social order that for so long he ascribed to himself. Moreover it appears to him that, if collective forms really exist, he is necessarily condemned to be subjected to them without being able to modify them. This is what inclines him to deny their existence. Repeated experiences have in vain attempted to teach him that this all-powerfulness, the illusion of which he so willingly entertains, has always been for him a cause of weakness; that his dominion over things only really began when he recognised that they have a nature of their own, and when he resigned himself to learning from them what they are. Banished from all other sciences, this deplorable prejudice stubbornly survives in sociology. Hence there is nothing more urgent than to seek to free our science from it: this is the main purpose of our efforts.

## Notes

1. It can be seen that to concede this proposition it is unnecessary to maintain that social life is made up of anything save representations. It is sufficient to posit that representations, whether individual or collective, cannot be studied scientifically unless they are studied objectively.
2. Moreover, this proposition is only partially accurate. As well as individuals, there are factors which are integrating elements in society. It is merely true that individuals are the only active elements in it.

3. It is superfluous to demonstrate how, from this viewpoint, the necessity for studying facts from the outside appears even more apparent, since they result from syntheses which takes place outside us and about which we have not even the hazy perception which consciousness can give us of internal phenomena.
4. The coercive power that we attribute to the social fact represents so small a part of its totality that it can equally well display the opposite characteristic. For, while institutions bear down upon us, we nevertheless cling to them; they impose obligations upon us, and yet we love them; they place constraints upon us, and yet we find satisfaction in the way they function, and in that very constraint. This antithesis is one that moralists have often pointed out as existing between the two notions of the good and of duty, which express two different aspects, but both equally real, of moral life. Now there are perhaps no collective practices which do not exert this dual influence upon us, which, moreover, is only apparent in contradiction. If we have not defined them in terms of this special attachment, which is both interested and disinterested, it is purely and simply because it does not reveal itself in easily perceptible external signs. The good possesses something more internal and intimate than duty, and is in consequence less tangible.
5. Cf. the article 'Sociologie' by Fauconnet and Mauss, published in the *Grande Encyclopédie*.
6. Despite the fact that beliefs and social practices permeate us in this way from the outside, it does not follow that we receive them passively and without causing them to undergo modification. In thinking about collective institutions, in assimilating ourselves to them, we individualise them, we more or less impart to them our own personal stamp. Thus in thinking about the world of the senses each one of us colours it in his own way, and different people adapt themselves differently to an identical physical environment. This is why each one of us creates to a certain extent *his own* morality, *his own* religion, *his own* techniques. Every type of social conformity carries with it a whole gamut of individual variations. It is nonetheless true that the sphere of permitted variations is limited. It is nonexistent or very small as regards religious and moral phenomena, where deviations may easily become crimes. It is more extensive for all matters relating to economic life. But sooner or later, even in this last case, one encounters a limit that must not be overstepped.

# Introduction

Up to now sociologists have scarcely occupied themselves with the task of characterising and defining the method that they apply to the study of social facts. Thus in the whole of Spencer's work the methodological problem has no place. *The Study of Sociology,* the title of which could be misleading, is devoted to demonstrating the difficulties and possibilities of sociology, not to setting out the procedures it should employ. It is true that Mill dealt with the question at some length.[1] But he merely submitted to the sieve of his own dialectic what Comte had said upon it, without adding any real contribution of his own. Therefore to all intents and purposes a chapter of the *Cours de philosophie positive*[2] is the only original and important study which we possess on the subject.

Yet there is nothing surprising in this apparent neglect. In fact the great sociologists just cited hardly went beyond generalities concerning the nature of societies, the relationships between the social and biological realms, and the general march of progress. Even Spencer's voluminous sociological work has hardly any other purpose than to show how the law of universal evolution is applied to societies. In order to deal with these philosophical questions, no special, complex procedures are necessary. Sociologists have therefore been content to weigh up the comparative merits of deduction and induction and to make a cursory enquiry into the most general resources that sociological research has at its command. But the precautions to be taken in the observation of facts, the manner in which the main problems should be set out, the direction that research should take, the particular procedures which may make it successful, the rules that should govern the demonstration of proof – all these remained undetermined.

A happy conjunction of circumstances, among which pride of place must rightly be assigned to the initiative which set up on our behalf a regular course in sociology at the Faculty of Letters at Bordeaux, allowed us to devote ourselves early on to the study of social science and even to make it our professional concern. Thus we have been able to move on from these over-general questions and tackle a certain number of specific problems. The very nature of things has therefore led us to work out a better-defined method, one which we believe to be more exactly adapted to the specific nature of social phenomena. It is the results of our work which we wish to set down here and submit to debate. They are undoubtedly implicit in our recently published book *La Division du Travail Social*. But it seems to us to have some advantage to single them out here, formulate them separately and accompany them with proofs, illustrating them with examples culled from that book or taken from work as yet unpublished. One will then be able to judge better the direction we are seeking to give to sociological studies.

**Notes**

1. J.S. Mill, *System of Logic*, vol.I, book VI, chs VII – XII (London, Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1872).
2. Cf. 2nd edn, Paris, pp. 294 – 336.

# Chapter I

# What is a Social Fact?

Before beginning the search for the method appropriate to the study of social facts it is important to know what are the facts termed 'social'.

The question is all the more necessary because the term is used without much precision. It is commonly used to designate almost all the phenomena that occur within society, however little social interest of some generality they present. Yet under this heading there is, so to speak, no human occurrence that cannot be called social. Every individual drinks, sleeps, eats, or employs his reason, and society has every interest in seeing that these functions are regularly exercised. If therefore these facts were social ones, sociology would possess no subject matter peculiarly its own, and its domain would be confused with that of biology and psychology.

However, in reality there is in every society a clearly determined group of phenomena separable, because of their distinct characteristics, from those that form the subject matter of other sciences of nature.

When I perform my duties as a brother, a husband or a citizen and carry out the commitments I have entered into, I fulfil obligations which are defined in law and custom and which are external to myself and my actions. Even when they conform to my own sentiments and when I feel their reality within me, that reality does not cease to be objective, for it is not I who have prescribed these duties; I have received them through education. Moreover, how often does it happen that we are ignorant of the details of the obligations that we must assume, and that, to know them, we must consult the legal code and its authorised interpreters! Similarly the believer has discovered from birth, ready fashioned, the beliefs

and practices of his religious life; if they existed before he did, it follows that they exist outside him. The system of signs that I employ to express my thoughts, the monetary system I use to pay my debts, the credit instruments I utilise in my commercial relationships, the practices I follow in my profession, etc., all function independently of the use I make of them. Considering in turn each member of society, the foregoing remarks can be repeated for each single one of them. Thus there are ways of acting, thinking and feeling which possess the remarkable property of existing outside the consciousness of the individual.

Not only are these types of behaviour and thinking external to the individual, but they are endued with a compelling and coercive power by virtue of which, whether he wishes it or not, they impose themselves upon him. Undoubtedly when I conform to them of my own free will, this coercion is not felt or felt hardly at all, since it is unnecessary. None the less it is intrinsically a characteristic of these facts; the proof of this is that it asserts itself as soon as I try to resist. If I attempt to violate the rules of law they react against me so as to forestall my action, if there is still time. Alternatively, they annul it or make my action conform to the norm if it is already accomplished but capable of being reversed; or they cause me to pay the penalty for it if it is irreparable. If purely moral rules are at stake, the public conscience restricts any act which infringes them by the surveillance it exercises over the conduct of citizens and by the special punishments it has at its disposal. In other cases the constraint is less violent; nevertheless, it does not cease to exist. If I do not conform to ordinary conventions, if in my mode of dress I pay no heed to what is customary in my country and in my social class, the laughter I provoke, the social distance at which I am kept, produce, although in a more mitigated form, the same results as any real penalty. In other cases, although it may be indirect, constraint is no less effective. I am not forced to speak French with my compatriots, nor to use the legal currency, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise. If I tried to escape the necessity, my attempt would fail miserably. As an industrialist nothing prevents me from working with the processes and methods of the previous century, but if I do I will most certainly ruin myself. Even when in fact I can struggle free from these rules and successfully break them, it is never without being forced to fight against them. Even if in the end they are overcome, they make

their constraining power sufficiently felt in the resistance that they afford. There is no innovator, even a fortunate one, whose ventures do not encounter opposition of this kind.

Here, then, is a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him. Consequently, since they consist of representations and actions, they cannot be confused with organic phenomena, nor with psychical phenomena, which have no existence save in and through the individual consciousness. Thus they constitute a new species and to them must be exclusively assigned the term *social*. It is appropriate, since it is clear that, not having the individual as their substratum, they can have none other than society, either political society in its entirety or one of the partial groups that it includes – religious denominations, political and literary schools, occupational corporations, etc. Moreover, it is for such as these alone that the term is fitting, for the word 'social' has the sole meaning of designating those phenomena which fall into none of the categories of facts already constituted and labelled. They are consequently the proper field of sociology. It is true that this word 'constraint', in terms of which we define them, is in danger of infuriating those who zealously uphold out-and-out individualism. Since they maintain that the individual is completely autonomous, it seems to them that he is diminished every time he is made aware that he is not dependent on himself alone. Yet since it is indisputable today that most of our ideas and tendencies are not developed by ourselves, but come to us from outside, they can only penetrate us by imposing themselves upon us. This is all that our definition implies. Moreover, we know that all social constraints do not necessarily exclude the individual personality.[1]

Yet since the examples just cited (legal and moral rules, religious dogmas, financial systems, etc.) consist wholly of beliefs and practices already well established, in view of what has been said it might be maintained that no social fact can exist except where there is a well defined social organisation. But there are other facts which do not present themselves in this already crystallised form but which also possess the same objectivity and ascendancy over the individual. These are what are called social 'currents'. Thus in a public gathering the great waves of enthu-

siasm, indignation and pity that are produced have their seat in no one individual consciousness. They come to each one of us from outside and can sweep us along in spite of ourselves. If perhaps I abandon myself to them I may not be conscious of the pressure that they are exerting upon me, but that pressure makes its presence felt immediately I attempt to struggle against them. If an individual tries to pit himself against one of these collective manifestations, the sentiments that he is rejecting will be turned against him. Now if this external coercive power asserts itself so acutely in cases of resistance, it must be because it exists in the other instances cited above without our being conscious of it. Hence we are the victims of an illusion which leads us to believe we have ourselves produced what has been imposed upon us externally. But if the willingness with which we let ourselves be carried along disguises the pressure we have undergone, it does not eradicate it. Thus air does not cease to have weight, although we no longer feel that weight. Even when we have individually and spontaneously shared in the common emotion, the impression we have experienced is utterly different from what we would have felt if we had been alone. Once the assembly has broken up and these social influences have ceased to act upon us, and we are once more on our own, the emotions we have felt seem an alien phenomenon, one in which we no longer recognise ourselves. It is then we perceive that we have undergone the emotions much more than generated them. These emotions may even perhaps fill us with horror, so much do they go against the grain. Thus individuals who are normally perfectly harmless may, when gathered together in a crowd, let themselves be drawn into acts of atrocity. And what we assert about these transitory outbreaks likewise applies to those more lasting movements of opinion which relate to religious, political, literary and artistic matters, etc., and which are constantly being produced around us, whether throughout society or in a more limited sphere.

Moreover, this definition of a social fact can be verified by examining an experience that is characteristic. It is sufficient to observe how children are brought up. If one views the facts as they are and indeed as they have always been, it is patently obvious that all education consists of a continual effort to impose upon the child ways of seeing, thinking and acting which he himself would not have arrived at spontaneously. From his earliest years we oblige

him to eat, drink and sleep at regular hours, and to observe cleanliness, calm and obedience; later we force him to learn how to be mindful of others, to respect customs and conventions, and to work, etc. If this constraint in time ceases to be felt it is because it gradually gives rise to habits, to inner tendencies which render it superfluous; but they supplant the constraint only because they are derived from it. It is true that, in Spencer's view, a rational education should shun such means and allow the child complete freedom to do what he will. Yet as this educational theory has never been put into practice among any known people, it can only be the personal expression of a *desideratum* and not a fact which can be established in contradiction to the other facts given above. What renders these latter facts particularly illuminating is that education sets out precisely with the object of creating a social being. Thus there can be seen, as in an abbreviated form, how the social being has been fashioned historically. The pressure to which the child is subjected unremittingly is the same pressure of the social environment which seeks to shape him in its own image, and in which parents and teachers are only the representatives and intermediaries.

Thus it is not the fact that they are general which can serve to characterise sociological phenomena. Thoughts to be found in the consciousness of each individual and movements which are repeated by all individuals are not for this reason social facts. If some have been content with using this characteristic in order to define them it is because they have been confused, wrongly, with what might be termed their individual incarnations. What constitutes social facts are the beliefs, tendencies and practices of the group taken collectively. But the forms that these collective states may assume when they are 'refracted' through individuals are things of a different kind. What irrefutably demonstrates this duality of kind is that these two categories of facts frequently are manifested dissociated from each other. Indeed some of these ways of acting or thinking acquire, by dint of repetition, a sort of consistency which, so to speak, separates them out, isolating them from the particular events which reflect them. Thus they assume a shape, a tangible form peculiar to them and constitute a reality *sui generis* vastly distinct from the individual facts which manifest that reality. Collective custom does not exist only in a state of immanence in the successive actions which it determines, but, by a privilege without

example in the biological kingdom, expresses itself once and for all in a formula repeated by word of mouth, transmitted by education and even enshrined in the written word. Such are the origins and nature of legal and moral rules, aphorisms and popular sayings, articles of faith in which religious or political sects epitomise their beliefs, and standards of taste drawn up by literary schools, etc. None of these modes of acting and thinking are to be found wholly in the application made of them by individuals, since they can even exist without being applied at the time.

Undoubtedly this state of dissociation does not always present itself with equal distinctiveness. It is sufficient for dissociation to exist unquestionably in the numerous important instances cited, for us to prove that the social fact exists separately from its individual effects. Moreover, even when the dissociation is not immediately observable, it can often be made so with the help of certain methodological devices. Indeed it is essential to embark on such procedures if one wishes to refine out the social fact from any amalgam and so observe it in its pure state. Thus certain currents of opinion, whose intensity varies according to the time and country in which they occur, impel us, for example, towards marriage or suicide, towards higher or lower birth-rates, etc. Such currents are plainly social facts. At first sight they seem inseparable from the forms they assume in individual cases. But statistics afford us a means of isolating them. They are indeed not inaccurately represented by rates of births, marriages and suicides, that is, by the result obtained after dividing the average annual total of marriages, births, and voluntary homicides by the number of persons of an age to marry, produce children, or commit suicide.[2] Since each one of these statistics includes without distinction all individual cases, the individual circumstances which may have played some part in producing the phenomenon cancel each other out and consequently do not contribute to determining the nature of the phenomenon. What it expresses is a certain state of the collective mind.

That is what social phenomena are when stripped of all extraneous elements. As regards their private manifestations, these do indeed having something social about them, since in part they reproduce the collective model. But to a large extent each one depends also upon the psychical and organic constitution of the individual, and on the particular circumstances in which he is

placed. Therefore they are not phenomena which are in the strict sense sociological. They depend on both domains at the same time, and could be termed socio-psychical. They are of interest to the sociologist without constituting the immediate content of sociology. The same characteristic is to be found in the organisms of those mixed phenomena of nature studied in the combined sciences such as biochemistry.

It may be objected that a phenomenon can only be collective if it is common to all the members of society, or at the very least to a majority, and consequently, if it is general. This is doubtless the case, but if it is general it is because it is collective (that is, more or less obligatory); but it is very far from being collective because it is general. It is a condition of the group repeated in individuals because it imposes itself upon them. It is in each part because it is in the whole, but far from being in the whole because it is in the parts. This is supremely evident in those beliefs and practices which are handed down to us ready fashioned by previous generations. We accept and adopt them because, since they are the work of the collectivity and one that is centuries old, they are invested with a special authority that our education has taught us to recognise and respect. It is worthy of note that the vast majority of social phenomena come to us in this way. But even when the social fact is partly due to our direct co-operation, it is no different in nature. An outburst of collective emotion in a gathering does not merely express the sum total of what individual feelings share in common, but is something of a very different order, as we have demonstrated. It is a product of shared existence, of actions and reactions called into play between the consciousnesses of individuals. If it is echoed in each one of them it is precisely by virtue of the special energy derived from its collective origins. If all hearts beat in unison, this is not as a consequence of a spontaneous, pre-established harmony; it is because one and the same force is propelling them in the same direction. Each one is borne along by the rest.

We have therefore succeeded in delineating for ourselves the exact field of sociology. It embraces one single, well defined group of phenomena. A social fact is identifiable through the power of external coercion which it exerts or is capable of exerting upon individuals. The presence of this power is in turn recognisable because of the existence of some pre-determined sanction, or

through the resistance that the fact opposes to any individual action that may threaten it. However, it can also be defined by ascertaining how widespread it is within the group, provided that, as noted above, one is careful to add a second essential characteristic; this is, that it exists independently of the particular forms that it may assume in the process of spreading itself within the group. In certain cases this latter criterion can even be more easily applied than the former one. The presence of constraint is easily ascertainable when it is manifested externally through some direct reaction of society, as in the case of law, morality, beliefs, customs and even fashions. But when constraint is merely indirect, as with that exerted by an economic organisation, it is not always so clearly discernible. Generality combined with objectivity may then be easier to establish. Moreover, this second definition is simply another formulation of the first one: if a mode of behaviour existing outside the consciousnesses of individuals becomes general, it can only do so by exerting pressure upon them.[3]

However, one may well ask whether this definition is complete. Indeed the facts which have provided us with its basis are all *ways of functioning:* they are 'physiological' in nature. But there are also collective *ways of being,* namely, social facts of an 'anatomical' or morphological nature. Sociology cannot dissociate itself from what concerns the substratum of collective life. Yet the number and nature of the elementary parts which constitute society, the way in which they are articulated, the degree of coalescence they have attained, the distribution of population over the earth's surface, the extent and nature of the network of communications, the design of dwellings, etc., do not at first sight seem relatable to ways of acting, feeling or thinking.

Yet, first and foremost, these various phenomena present the same characteristic which has served us in defining the others. These ways of being impose themselves upon the individual just as do the ways of acting we have dealt with. In fact, when we wish to learn how a society is divided up politically, in what its divisions consist and the degree of solidarity that exists between them, it is not through physical inspection and geographical observation that we may come to find this out: such divisions are social, although they may have some physical basis. It is only through public law that we can study such political organisation, because this law is what determines its nature, just as it determines our domestic and

civic relationships. The organisation is no less a form of compulsion. If the population clusters together in our cities instead of being scattered over the rural areas, it is because there exists a trend of opinion, a collective drive which imposes this concentration upon individuals. We can no more choose the design of our houses than the cut of our clothes – at least, the one is as much obligatory as the other. The communication network forcibly prescribes the direction of internal migrations or commercial exchanges, etc., and even their intensity. Consequently, at the most there are grounds for adding one further category to the list of phenomena already enumerated as bearing the distinctive stamp of a social fact. But as that enumeration was in no wise strictly exhaustive, this addition would not be indispensable.

Moreover, it does not even serve a purpose, for these ways of being are only ways of acting that have been consolidated. A society's political structure is only the way in which its various component segments have become accustomed to living with each other. If relationships between them are traditionally close, the segments tend to merge together; if the contrary, they tend to remain distinct. The type of dwelling imposed upon us is merely the way in which everyone around us and, in part, previous generations, have customarily built their houses. The communication network is only the channel which has been cut by the regular current of commerce and migrations, etc., flowing in the same direction. Doubtless if phenomena of a morphological kind were the only ones that displayed this rigidity, it might be thought that they constituted a separate species. But a legal rule is no less permanent an arrangement than an architectural style, and yet it is a 'physiological' fact. A simple moral maxim is certainly more malleable, yet it is cast in forms much more rigid than a mere professional custom or fashion. Thus there exists a whole range of gradations which, without any break in continuity, join the most clearly delineated structural facts to those free currents of social life which are not yet caught in any definite mould. This therefore signifies that the differences between them concern only the degree to which they have become consolidated. Both are forms of life at varying stages of crystallisation. It would undoubtedly be advantageous to reserve the term 'morphological' for those social facts which relate to the social substratum, but only on condition that one is aware that they are of the same nature as the others.

Our definition will therefore subsume all that has to be defined it if states:

*A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint*;

or:

*which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations.*[4]

**Notes**

1. Moreover, this is not to say that all constraint is normal. We shall return to this point later.
2. Suicides do not occur at any age, nor do they occur at all ages of life with the same frequency.
3. It can be seen how far removed this definition of the social fact is from that which serves as the basis for the ingenious system of Tarde. We must first state that our research has nowhere led us to corroboration of the preponderant influence that Tarde attributes to imitation in the genesis of collective facts. Moreover, from this definition, which is not a theory but a mere résumé of the immediate data observed, it seems clearly to follow that imitation does not always express, indeed never expresses, what is essential and characteristic in the social fact. Doubtless every social fact is imitated and has, as we have just shown, a tendency to become generalised, but this is because it is social, i.e. obligatory. Its capacity for expansion is not the cause but the consequence of its sociological character. If social facts were unique in bringing about this effect, imitation might serve, if not to explain them, at least to define them. But an individual state which impacts on others none the less remains individual. Moreover, one may speculate whether the term 'imitation' is indeed appropriate to designate a proliferation which occurs through some coercive influence. In such a single term very different phenomena, which need to be distinguished, are confused.
4. This close affinity of life and structure, organ and function, can be readily established in sociology because there exists between these two extremes a whole series of intermediate stages, immediately observable, which reveal the link between them. Biology lacks this methodological resource. But one may believe legitimately that sociological inductions on this subject are applicable to biology and that, in organisms as in societies, between these two categories of facts only differences in degree exist.

# Chapter II

# Rules for the Observation of Social Facts

The first and most basic rule is *to consider social facts as things.*

## I

At the moment when a new order of phenomena becomes the object of a science they are already represented in the mind, not only through sense perceptions, but also by some kind of crudely formed concepts. Before the first rudiments of physics and chemistry were known, men already possessed notions about physical and chemical phenomena which went beyond pure perception alone. Such, for example, are those to be found intermingled with all religions. This is because reflective thought precedes science, which merely employs it more methodically. Man cannot live among things without forming ideas about them according to which he regulates his behaviour. But, because these notions are closer to us and more within our mental grasp than the realities to which they correspond, we naturally tend to substitute them for the realities, concentrating our speculations upon them. Instead of observing, describing and comparing things, we are content to reflect upon our ideas, analysing and combining them. Instead of a science which deals with realities, we carry out no more than an ideological analysis. Certainly this analysis does not rule out all observation. We can appeal to the facts to corroborate these notions or the conclusions drawn from them. But then the facts intervene only secondarily, as examples or confirmatory proof. Thus they are not the subject matter of the science, which therefore proceeds from ideas to things, and not from things to ideas.

It is clear that this method cannot yield objective results. These notions or concepts – however they are designated – are of course not legitimate surrogates for things. The products of common experience, their main purpose is to attune our actions to the surrounding world; they are formed by and for experience. Now a representation can effectively perform this function even if it is theoretically false. Several centuries ago Copernicus dispelled the illusions our senses experienced concerning the movements of the heavenly bodies, and yet it is still according to these illusions that we commonly regulate the distribution of our time. For an idea to stimulate the reaction that the nature of a thing demands, it need not faithfully express that nature. It is sufficient for it to make us perceive what is useful or disadvantageous about the thing, and in what ways it can render us service or disservice. But notions formed in this way can only present a roughly appropriate practicality, and then only in the general run of cases. How often are they both dangerous and inadequate! It is therefore not by elaborating upon them, however one treats them, that we will ever succeed in discovering the laws of reality. On the contrary, they are as a veil interposed between the things and ourselves, concealing them from us even more effectively because we believe to be more transparent.

Such a science can only be a stunted one, for it lacks the subject matter on which to feed. It has hardly come into existence, one might say, before it vanishes, transmuted into an art. Allegedly its notions contain all that is essential to reality, but this is because they are confused with the reality itself. From then onwards they appear to contain all that is needful for us not only to understand what is, but also to prescribe what should be done and the means of implementation, for what is good is in conformity with the nature of things. What goes against nature is bad, and the means of attaining the good and eluding the bad both derive from that same nature. Thus if we have already comprehended the reality from the first, to study it has no longer any practical interest. Since it is this interest which is the reason for our study, there is henceforth no purpose to it. Our reflective thought is thus induced to turn away from what is the true subject matter of the science, namely the present and the past, and in one fell swoop to proceed to the future. Instead of seeking to understand the facts already discovered and acquired, it immediately undertakes to reveal new ones, more in accord with the ends that men pursue. If men think

they know what is the essence of matter, they immediately embark on the quest for the philosopher's stone. This encroachment of art upon science, which hinders the latter's development, is made easy also by the very circumstances which determine the awakening of scientific reflection. For, since this reflection comes into being only to satisfy vital needs, it is quite naturally directed towards practical matters. The needs which it is called upon to assuage are always pressing ones, and consequently urge it to arrive at conclusions. Remedies, not explanations, are required.

This procedure is so much in accordance with the natural inclination of our mind that it is even to be found in the beginnings of the physical sciences. It is what characterises alchemy as distinct from chemistry, and astrology from astronomy. It is how Bacon characterises the method followed by the scholars of his day – one which he fought against. Indeed the notions just discussed are those *notiones vulgares,* or *praenotiones,*[1] which he points out as being at the basis of all the sciences,[2] in which they take the place of facts.[3] It is these *idola* which, resembling ghost-like creatures, distort the true appearance of things, but which we nevertheless mistake for the things themselves. It is because this imagined world offers no resistance that the mind, feeling completely unchecked, gives rein to limitless ambitions, believing it possible to construct – or rather reconstruct – the world through its own power and according to its wishes.

If this has been true for the natural sciences, how much more had it to be true for sociology. Men did not wait on the coming of social science to have ideas about law, morality, the family, the state or society itself, for such ideas were indispensable to their lives. It is above all in sociology that these preconceptions, to employ again Bacon's expression, are capable of holding sway over the mind, substituting themselves for things. Indeed, social things are only realised by men: they are the product of human activity. Thus they appear to be nothing save the operationalising of ideas, which may or may not be innate but which we carry within us, and their application to the various circumstances surrounding men's relationships with one another. The organisation of the family, of contracts, or repression, of the state and of society seems therefore to be a simple development of the ideas we have about society, the state, justice, etc. Consequently these and similar facts seem to lack any reality save in and through the ideas

which engender them and which, from then on, become the subject matter proper of sociology.

The apparent justification for this view derives from the fact that since the details of social life swamp the consciousness from all sides, it has not a sufficiently strong perception of the details to feel the reality behind them. Lacking ties that are firm enough or close enough to us, this all produces the impression upon us that it is clinging to nothing and floating in a vacuum, consisting of matter half unreal and infinitely malleable. This is why so many thinkers have seen in the social organisation mere combinations which are artificial and to some degree arbitrary. But if the details and the special concrete forms elude us, at least we represent to ourselves in a rough, approximate way the most general aspects of collective existence. It is precisely these schematic, summary representations which constitute the prenotions that we employ in our normal way of life. Thus we cannot visualise their existence being called into question, since we see it at the same time as we see our own. Not only are they within us, but since they are the product of repeated experiences, they are invested with a kind of ascendancy and authority, by dint of repetition and the habit which results from it. We feel their resistance when we seek to free ourselves from them, and we cannot fail to regard as real something which pits itself against us. Thus everything conspires to make us see in them the true social reality.

And indeed up to now sociology has dealt more or less exclusively not with things, but with concepts. It is true that Comte proclaimed that social phenomena are natural facts, subject to natural laws. In so doing he implicitly recognised their character as things, for in nature there are only things. Yet when, leaving behind these general philosophical statements, he tries to apply his principle and deduce from it the science it contained, it is ideas which he too takes as the object of his study. Indeed, what constitutes the principal subject matter of his sociology is the progress over time of humanity. His starting point is the idea that the continuous evolution of the human species consists of an ever-growing perfection of human nature. The problem with which he deals is how to discover the sequence of this evolution. Yet, even supposing this evolution exists, its reality can only be established when the science has been worked out. Thus the evolution cannot be made the subject of research unless it is

postulated as a conception of the mind, and not a thing. In fact, so much is this a wholly subjective idea, this progress of humanity does not exist. What do exist, and what alone are presented to us for observation, are particular societies which are born, develop and die independently of one another. If indeed the most recent societies were a continuation of those which had preceded them, each superior type might be considered merely as the repetition of the type at the level immediately below it, with some addition. They could all then be placed end-on, so to speak, assimilating together all those at the same stage of development; the series thus formed might be considered representative of humanity. But the facts do not present themselves with such extreme simplicity. A people which takes the place of another is not merely a prolongation of the latter with some new features added. It is different, gaining some extra properties, but having lost others. It constitutes a new individuality, and all such distinct individualities, being heterogeneous, cannot be absorbed into the same continuous series, and above all not into one single series. The succession of societies cannot be represented by a geometrical line; on the contrary, it resembles a tree whose branches grow in divergent directions. Briefly, in his consideration of historical development, Comte has taken his own notion of it, which is one that does not differ greatly from that commonly held. It is true that, viewed from a distance, history does take on somewhat neatly this simple aspect of a series. One perceives only a succession of individuals all moving in the same direction, because they have the same human nature. Moreover, since it is inconceivable that social evolution can be anything other than the development of some human idea, it appears entirely natural to define it by the conception that men have of it. But if one proceeds down this path one not only remains in the realm of ideology, but assigns to sociology as its object a concept which has nothing peculiarly sociological about it.

Spencer discards this concept, but replaces it with another which is none the less formed in the same way. He makes societies, and not humanity, the object of his study, but immediately gives to societies a definition which causes the thing of which he speaks to disappear and puts in its place the preconception he has of them. In fact he states as a self-evident proposition that 'a society is formed only when, besides juxtaposition, there is co-operation'; it

is solely in this way that the union of individuals becomes a society proper.[4] Then, starting from this principle, that co-operation is the essence of social life, he divides societies into two classes according to the nature of the predominant mode of co-operation. 'There is', he states, 'a spontaneous co-operation which grows up without thought during the pursuit of private ends; and there is a co-operation which, consciously devised, implies distinct recognition of public ends',[5] The first category he dubs industrial societies, the latter military societies. One may say of this distinction that it is the seminal idea for his sociology.

But this initial definition enunciates as a thing what is only a mental viewpoint. It is presented as the expression of a fact that is immediately apparent, one sufficiently ascertained by observation, since it is formulated from the very beginning of the science as an axiom. Yet from mere inspection it is impossible to know whether co-operation really is the mainspring of social life. Such an assertion is only scientifically justified if at first all the manifestations of collective life have been reviewed and it has been demonstrated that they are all various forms of co-operation. Thus once again a certain conception of social reality is substituted for that reality.[6] What is defined in this way is not society but Spencer's idea of it. If he feels no scruples in proceeding in this fashion it is because for him also society is only, and can be only, the realisation of an idea, namely that very idea of co-operation by which he defines society.[7] It would be easy to show, in each of the particular problems that he tackles, that his method remains the same. Also, although he has an air of proceeding empirically, because the facts accumulated in his sociology are used to illustrate analyses of notions rather than to describe and explain things, they seem indeed to be there to serve as arguments. All that is really essential in his doctrine can be directly deduced from his definition of society and the different forms of co-operation. For if we have only the choice between co-operation tyranically imposed and one that is free and spontaneous, it is plainly the latter which is the ideal towards which humanity does and ought to strive.

These common notions are not to be encountered only at the basis of the sciences, but are also to be found constantly as the arguments unravel. In our present state of knowledge we do not know exactly what the state is, nor sovereignty, political freedom, democracy, socialism, communism, etc. Thus our method should

make us forswear any use of these concepts so long as they have not been scientifically worked out. Yet the words that express them recur continually in the discussions of sociologists. They are commonly used with assurance, as if they corresponded to things well known and well defined, while in fact they evoke in us only confused notions, an amalgam of vague impressions, prejudices and passions. Today we mock at the strange ratiocinations that the doctors of the Middle Ages constructed from their notions of heat and cold, humidity and dryness, etc. Yet we do not perceive that we continue to apply the selfsame method to an order of phenomena which is even less appropriate for it than any other, on account of its extreme complexity.

In the specialised branches of sociology this ideological character is even more marked.

It is particularly so in the case of ethics. It may in fact be asserted that there is not a single system which does not represent it as the simple development of an initial idea which enshrines it potentially in its entirety. Some believe that men possess this idea complete at birth; on the other hand, others believe that it has grown up at a varying rate in the course of history. But for both empiricists and rationalists this is all that is truly real about morality. As for detailed legal and moral rules, these would have, in a manner of speaking, no existence *per se*, being merely applications of the basic notion to the particular circumstances of living, and varying according to different cases. Hence the subject matter of morality cannot be this unreal system of precepts, but the idea from which the precepts derive and which is interpreted differently according to cases. Thus all the questions that ethics normally raises relate not to things but to ideas. We must know what constitutes the ideas of law and morality and not what is the nature of morality and law considered in their own right. Moralists have not yet even grasped the simple truth that, just as our representations of things perceived by the senses spring from those things themselves and express them more or less accurately, our representation of morality springs from observing the rules that function before our very eyes and perceives them systematically. Consequently it is these rules and not the cursory view we have of them which constitute the subject matter of science, just as the subject matter of physics consists of actual physical bodies and not the idea that ordinary people have of it. The outcome is that the

basis of morality is taken to be what is only its superstructure, namely, the way in which it extends itself to the individual consciousness and makes its impact upon it. Nor is it only for the more general problems of science that this method is followed; it is not modified even for more specialised questions. From the essential ideas that he studies at the outset the moralist passes on to the examination of second-order ideas, such as family, country, responsibility, charity and justice – but it is always to ideas that his thinking is applied.

The same applies to political economy. John Stuart Mill states that its subject matter is the social facts which arise principally or exclusively with a view to the acquisition of wealth.[8] But, in order for the facts defined in this way to be submitted to the scrutiny of the scientist as things, at the very least it should be possible to indicate the means whereby those which satisfy this condition can be recognised. With a new science one is no position to affirm that the facts exist, and even less to know what they are. In any kind of investigation it is only when the explanation of the facts is fairly well advanced that it is possible to establish that they have a goal and what that goal is. There is no problem more complex or less likely to be resolved at the very beginning. We therefore lack any prior assurance that a sphere of social activity exists where the desire for wealth really plays this predominant role. Consequently the subject matter of economics so conceived is made up not of realities which may be precisely pointed to, but merely of possible ones, pure conceptions of the mind. They are facts which the economist *conceives* of as relating to the purpose under consideration, and facts as he conceives them. If, for example, he embarks on a study of what he terms production, he believes it possible immediately to spell out and review the principal agencies which assist it. This means therefore that he has not ascertained their existence by studying on what conditions depends the thing that he is studying. If he had, he would have begun by setting out the operations from which he drew that conclusion. If, in summary terms, at the beginning of his researches he proceeds to make such a classification, it is because he has arrived at it by mere logical analysis. He starts from the idea of production and as he dissects it he finds that it logically entails ideas of natural forces, of work, of tools or capital and he then goes on to treat in the same way these ideas which he has derived.[9]

The most basic economic theory of all, that of value, has clearly been built up according to the same method. If value were studied as a fact having reality should be, the economist would show how the thing so designated could be identified; he would then classify its various kinds, testing by methodical inductions how these vary according to different causes, and finally comparing the various results in order to arrive at a general formulation. A theory could therefore only emerge when the science was fairly well advanced. Instead it is met with at the very beginning. To do this the economist contents himself with his own reflective thinking, evoking his idea of value, namely that of an object capable of being exchanged. He finds that this implies the ideas of utility and scarcity, etc., and it is from these fruits of his analysis that he constructs his definition. He doubtless backs it up with a few examples. But, reflecting on the countless facts which such a theory must explain, how can one concede the slightest validity of proof to the necessarily very few facts which are cited at random as they suggest themselves to him?

Thus in political economy, as in ethics, the role of scientific investigation is extremely limited, and that of art is preponderant. The theoretical part of ethics is reduced to a few discussions on the ideas of duty, goodness and right. But such abstract speculations do not strictly speaking constitute a science, since their purpose is not to determine what is, in fact, supreme moral law, but what ought to be. Likewise, what economists dwell on most in their researches is the problem of knowing, for example, whether society *should be* organised on individualistic or socialist lines; whether *it is better* for the state to intervene in industrial and commercial relations or abandon them entirely to private initiative; whether the monetary system *should be* based on monometallism or bimetallism, etc. Laws properly so called are very few; even those which by custom we call laws do not generally merit the term, but are merely maxims for action, or in reality practical precepts. For example, the celebrated law of supply and demand has never been established inductively as an expression of economic reality. Never has any experiment or methodical comparison been instituted to establish whether, *in fact,* it is according to this law that economic relations are regulated. All that could be done, and has been done, has been to demonstrate by dialectical argument that individuals should act in this way if they perceive

what is in their best interest; any other course of action would be harmful to them, and if they followed it would indeed constitute an error of logic. It is logical that the most productive industries should be the most prized, and that those who hold goods most in demand and most scarce should sell them at the highest price. But this entirely logical necessity in no way resembles the one that the true laws of nature reveal. These express the relationships whereby facts are linked together in reality, and not the way in which it would be good for them to be linked.

What we state about this law can be repeated for all those that the orthodox school of economists term 'natural' and which, moreover, are scarcely more than special cases of this first law. They may be said to be natural in the sense that they enunciate the means which are, or may appear to be, natural to employ in order to reach some assumed goal. But they should not be termed so if by a natural law is understood any inductively verified mode of existence of nature. All in all, they are mere counsels of practical wisdom. If it has been possible to present them to a more or less plausible extent as a clear expression of reality, it is because, rightly or wrongly, the assumption has been that these counsels were effectively those followed by most men and in the majority of cases.

Yet social phenomena are things and should be treated as such. To demonstrate this proposition one does not need to philosophise about their nature or to discuss the analogies they present with phenomena of a lower order of existence. Suffice to say that they are the sole *datum* afforded the sociologist. A thing is in effect all that is given, all that is offered, or rather forces itself upon our observation. To treat phenomena as things is to treat them as *data*, and this constitutes the starting point for science. Social phenomena unquestionably display this characteristic. What is given is not the idea that men conceive of value, because that is unattainable; rather is it the values actually exchanged in economic transactions. It is also not some conception or other of the moral ideal; it is the sum total of rules that in effect determine behaviour. It is not the idea of utility or wealth; it is all the details of economic organisation. Social life may possibly be merely the development of certain notions, but even if this is assumed to be the case, these notions are not revealed to us immediately. They cannot therefore be attained directly, but only through the real phenomena that

express them. We do not know a *priori* what ideas give rise to the various currents into which social life divides, nor whether they exist. It is only after we have traced the currents back to their source that we will know from where they spring.

Social phenomena must therefore be considered in themselves, detached from the conscious beings who form their own mental representations of them. They must be studied from the outside, as external things, because it is in this guise that they present themselves to us. If this quality of externality proves to be only apparent, the illusion will be dissipated as the science progresses and we will see, so to speak, the external merge with the internal. But the outcome cannot be anticipated, and even if in the end social phenomena may not have all the features intrinsic to things, they must at first be dealt with as if they had. This rule is therefore applicable to the whole of social reality and there is no reason for any exceptions to be made. Even those phenomena which give the greatest appearance of being artificial in their arrangement should be considered from this viewpoint. *The conventional character of a practice or an institution should never be assumed in advance.* If, moreover, we are allowed to invoke personal experience, we believe we can state with confidence that by following this procedure one will often have the satisfaction of seeing the apparently most arbitrary facts, after more attentive observation, display features of constancy and regularity symptomatic of their objectivity.

In general, moreover, what has been previously stated about the distinctive features of the social fact gives us sufficient reassurance about the nature of this objectivity to demonstrate that it is not illusory. A thing is principally recognisable by virtue of not being capable of modification through a mere act of the will. This is not because it is intractable to all modification. But to effect change the will is not sufficient; it needs a degree of arduous effort because of the strength of the resistance it offers, which even then cannot always be overcome. We have seen that social facts possess this property of resistance. Far from their being a product of our will, they determine it from without. They are like moulds into which we are forced to cast our actions. The necessity is often ineluctable. But even when we succeed in triumphing, the opposition we have encountered suffices to alert us that we are faced with something independent of ourselves. Thus in considering facts as

things we shall be merely conforming to their nature.

In the end, the reform that must be introduced into sociology is identical in every respect to that which has transformed psychology over the last thirty years. Just as Comte and Spencer declare that social facts are facts of nature, but nevertheless refuse to treat them as things, the different empirical schools had long recognised the natural character of psychological phenomena, while continuing to apply to them a purely ideological method. Indeed the empiricists, no less than their opponents, proceeded exclusively by introspection. But the facts observable in ourselves are too few, too fleeting and malleable, to be able to impose themselves upon the corresponding notions that habit has rooted in us and to prevail over them. Thus when these notions are not subject to some other control, no countervailing force exists; consequently they take the place of facts and constitute the subject matter of the science. Thus neither Locke nor Condillac considered physical phenomena objectively. It is not sensation they study, but a certain idea of it. This is why, although in certain respects they were its forerunners, scientific psychology arose only much later. It arose after it had been finally established that states of consciousness can and must be studied externally and not from the perspective of the individual consciousness which experiences them. This is the great revolution that has been accomplished in this field of study. All the special procedures and new methods which have enriched this science are only various expedients for realising more fully this basic idea. Such an advance remains to be accomplished in sociology, which must pass from the subjective stage, beyond which it has hardly progressed, to the objective stage.

This transition, moreover, is less difficult to accomplish in sociology than in psychology. Psychical facts naturally appertain to states of the individual, from whom they do not even appear to be separable. Internal by definition, such states cannot seemingly be treated as external save by doing violence to their nature. Not only is an effort of abstraction necessary, but a whole gamut of procedures and artifices as well, for them to be considered successfully from the external viewpoint. Social facts, on the other hand, display much more naturally and immediately all the characteristics of a thing. Law is enshrined in legal codes, the events of daily life are registered in statistical figures and historical

monuments, fashions are preserved in dress, taste in works of art. By their very nature social facts tend to form outside the consciousnesses of individuals, since they dominate them. To perceive them in their capacity as things it is therefore not necessary to engage in an ingenious distortion. From this viewpoint sociology has significant advantages over psychology which have hitherto not been perceived, and this should accelerate its development. Its facts are perhaps more difficult to interpret because they are more complex, but they are more readily accessible. Psychology, on the other hand, has not only difficulty in specifying its facts, but also in comprehending them. Thus one may legitimately believe that as soon as this principle of sociological method has been universally acknowledged and is put into practice, sociology will be seen to progress at a speed that its present slow rate of development would scarcely allow one to suppose, even making up the lead of psychology, which it owes solely to its prior historical place[10].

## II

But our predecessors' experience has shown us that, in order to realise in practice the truth just established, it is not enough to demonstrate it theoretically or even to absorb it oneself. The mind has such a natural disposition to fail to recognise it that inevitably we will relapse into past errors unless we submit ourselves to a rigorous discipline. We shall formulate the principal rules for this discipline, all of which are corollaries of the previous rule.

(1) The first of these corollaries is: *One must systematically discard all preconceptions.* Special proof of this rule is unnecessary: it follows from all that we have stated above. Moreover, it is the basis of all scientific method. Descartes' method of doubt is in essence only an application of it. If at the very moment of the foundation of science Descartes prescribed a rule for himself to question all the ideas he had previously accepted, it is because he wished to use only concepts which had been scientifically worked out, that is, constructed according to the method that he devised. All those of another origin had therefore to be rejected, at least for the time being. We have seen that Bacon's theory of the idols has the same significance. The two great doctrines, so often placed in contradiction to each other, agree on this essential point. Thus

the sociologist, either when he decides upon the object of his research or in the course of his investigations, must resolutely deny himself the use of those concepts formed outside science and for needs entirely unscientific. He must free himself from those fallacious notions which hold sway over the mind of the ordinary person, shaking off, once and for all, the yoke of those empirical categories that long habit often makes tyrannical. If necessity sometimes forces him to resort to them, let him at least do so in full cognisance of the little value they possess, so as not to assign to them in the investigation a role which they are unfit to play.

What makes emancipation from such notions peculiarly difficult in sociology is that sentiment so often intervenes. We enthuse over our political and religious beliefs and moral practices very differently from the way we do over the objects of the physical world. Consequently this emotional quality is transmitted to the way in which we conceive and explain our beliefs. The ideas that we form about them are deeply felt, just as are their purposes, thereby taking on such authority that they brook no contradiction. Any opinion which is embarrassing is treated as hostile. For example, a proposition may not accord with our view of patriotism or personal dignity. It is therefore denied, whatever may be the proofs advanced. We cannot allow it to be true. It is rejected, and our strong emotions, seeking a justification for so doing, have no difficulty in suggesting reasons which we find readily conclusive. These notions may even be so prestigious that they will not tolerate scientific examination. The mere fact of subjecting them, as well as the phenomena they express, to cold, dry analysis is repugnant to certain minds. The sociologist who undertakes to study morality objectively as an external reality seems to such sensitive souls bereft of moral sense, just as the vivisectionist seems to the ordinary person devoid of normal feelings. Far from admitting that these sentiments are subject to science, it is believed that it is to them one should address onself in order to construct the science of things to which they relate. 'Woe', writes an eloquent historian of religions, 'Woe to the scientist who approaches the things of God without having in the depths of his consciousness, in the innermost indestructible parts of his being, in which sleep the souls of his ancestors, an unknown sanctuary from which at times there arises the fragrance of incense, a verse of a psalm, a cry of sorrow or triumph that as a child, following his

brothers' example, he raised to heaven, and which suddenly joins him once again in communion with the prophets of yore!'[11]

One cannot protest too strongly against this mystical doctrine which – like all mysticism, moreover – is in essence only a disguised empiricism, the negation of all science. Feelings relating to social things enjoy no pride of place over other sentiments, for they have no different origin. They too have been shaped through history. They are a product of human experience, albeit one confused and unorganised. They are not due to some transcendental precognition of reality, but are the result of all kinds of disordered impressions and emotions accumulated through chance circumstance, lacking systematic interpretation. Far from bringing enlightenment of a higher order than the rational, they are composed exclusively of states of mind which, it is true, are strong but also confused. To grant them such a predominant role is to ascribe to the lower faculties of the intelligence supremacy over superior ones and to condemn oneself more or less to a rhetorical logomachy. A science constituted in this way can only satisfy those minds who prefer to think with their sensibility rather than their understanding, who prefer the immediate and confused syntheses of sensation to the patient, illuminating analyses of the reason. Feeling is an object for scientific study, not the criterion of scientific truth. But there is no science which at its beginnings has not encountered similar resistances. There was a time when those feelings relating to the things of the physical world, since they also possessed a religious or moral character, opposed no less violently the establishment of the physical sciences. Thus one can believe that, rooted out from one science after another, this prejudice will finally disappear from sociology as well, its last refuge, and leave the field clear for the scientist.

(2) But the above rule is entirely negative. It teaches the sociologist to escape from the dominance of commonly held notions and to direct his attention to the facts, but does not state how he is to grasp the facts in order to study them objectively.

Every scientific investigation concerns a specific group of phenomena which are subsumed under the same definition. The sociologist's first step must therefore be to define the things he treats, so that we may know – he as well – exactly what his subject matter is. This is the prime and absolutely indispensable condition of any proof or verification. A theory can only be checked if we

know how to recognise the facts for which it must account. Moreover, since this initial definition determines the subject matter itself of the science, that subject matter will either consist of a thing or not, according to how this definition is formulated.

To be objective the definition clearly must express the phenomena as a function, not of an idea of the mind, but of their inherent properties. It must characterise them according to some integrating element in their nature and not according to whether they conform to some more or less ideal notion. When research is only just beginning and the facts have not yet been submitted to any analysis, their sole ascertainable characteristics are those sufficiently external to be immediately apparent. Those less apparent are doubtless more essential. Their explanatory value is greater, but they remain unknown at this stage of scientific knowledge and cannot be visualised save by substituting for reality some conception of the mind. Thus it is among the first group of visible characteristics that must be sought the elements for this basic definition. Yet it is clear that the definition will have to include, without exception or distinction, all the phenomena which equally manifest these same characteristics, for we have no reason nor the means to discriminate between them. These properties, then, are all that we know of reality. Consequently they must determine absolutely how the facts should be classified. We possess no other criterion which can even partially invalidate the effect of this rule. Hence the following rule: *The subject matter of research must only include a group of phenomena defined beforehand by certain common external characteristics and all phenomena which correspond to this definition must be so included.* For example, we observe that certain actions exist which all possess the one external characteristic that, once they have taken place, they provoke on the part of society that special reaction known as punishment. We constitute them as a group *sui generis* and classify them under a single heading: any action that is punished is termed a crime and we make crime, so defined, the subject matter of a special science of criminology. Likewise we observe within all known societies the existence of a smaller society outwardly recognisable because it is formed for the most part of individuals linked by a blood relationship and joined to each other by legal ties. From the relevant facts we constitute a special group to which we assign a distinctive name: phenomena of domestic life. We term every aggregate of

this kind a family and make the family, so defined, the subject matter of a specific investigation which has not yet received a special designation in sociological terminology. When we later pass on from the family in general to the different types of family, the same rule should be applied. For example, embarking upon a study of the clan, or the maternal or patriarchal family, we should begin by defining them according to the same method. The subject matter of each topic, whether general or specialised, should be constituted according to the same principle.

By proceeding in this way from the outset the sociologist is immediately grounded firmly in reality. Indeed, how the facts are classified does not depend on him, or on his own particular cast of mind, but on the nature of things. The criterion which determines whether they are to be grouped in a particular category can be demonstrated and generally accepted by everybody, and the observer's statements can be verified by others. It is true that a notion built up in this way does not always chime – or does not generally even chime at all – with the notion commonly held. For example, it is evident that acts relating to freedom of thought or lapses in etiquette which are so regularly and severely punished in many societies, from the viewpoint of common sense are not regarded as crimes when people consider those societies. In the same way a clan is not a family in the usual sense of the word. But this is of no consequence, for it is not simply a question of how we can discover with a fair degree of accuracy the facts to which the words of common parlance refer and the ideas that they convey. What has to be done is to form fresh concepts *de novo*, ones appropriate to the needs of science and expressed by the use of a special terminology. It is certainly not true that the commonly held concept is useless to the scientist. It serves as a benchmark, indicating to him that somewhere there exists a cluster of phenomena bearing the same name and which consequently are likely to possess common characteristics. Moreover, since the common concept is never without some relationship to the phenomena, it occasionally points to the approximate direction in which they are to be discovered. But as the concept is only crudely formulated, it is quite natural for it not to coincide exactly with the scientific concept which it has been instrumental in instituting.[12]

However obvious and important this rule is, it is scarcely observed at present in sociology. Precisely because sociology deals

with things which are constantly on our lips, such as the family, property, crime, etc., very often it appears useless to the sociologist initially to ascribe a rigorous definition to them. We are so accustomed to using these words, which recur constantly in the course of conversation, that it seems futile to delimit the meaning being given to them. We simply refer to the common notion of them, but this is very often ambiguous. This ambiguity causes us to classify under the same heading and with the same explanation things which are in reality very different. From this there arises endless confusion. Thus, for example, there are two kinds of monogamous unions: the ones that exist in fact, and those that exist legally. In the first kind the husband has only one wife, although legally he may have several; in the second kind polygamy is legally prohibited. Monogamy is met with *de facto* in several animal species and certain societies at a lower stage of development, not sporadically, but indeed with the same degree of generality as if it had been imposed by law. When a tribe is scattered over a wide area the social bond is very loose and consequently individuals live isolated from each other. Hence every man naturally seeks a female mate, but only one, because in his isolated state it is difficult for him to secure several. Compulsory monogamy, on the other hand, is only observed in societies at the highest stage of development. These two kinds of conjugal union have therefore very different significance, and yet the same word serves to described them both. We commonly say that certain animals are monogamous, although in their case there is nothing remotely resembling a legal tie. Spencer, embarking on his study of marriage, uses the term monogamy, without defining it, in its usual and equivocal sense. Consequently for him the development of marriage appears to present an incomprehensible anomaly, since he thinks he can observe the higher form of sexual union from the very earliest stages of historical development, while it apparently tends to disappear in the intermediate period, only to reappear again later. He concludes from this that there is no consistent relationship between social progress in general and the progressive advance towards a perfect type of family life. A definition at the appropriate time would have obviated this error.[13]

In other cases great care is taken to define the subject matter of the research but instead of including in the definition and grouping

under the same heading all phenomena possessing the same external properties, a selection is made. Certain phenomena, a kind of elite, are chosen as those considered to have the sole right to possess these characteristics. The others are held to have usurped these distinctive features and are disregarded. It is easy to envisage that, using this procedure, only a subjective and partial notion can be obtained. Such a process of elimination can in fact only be made according to a preconceived idea, since at the beginnings of a science no research would have been able to establish whether such a usurpation was real, even assuming it to be possible. The phenomena selected can only have been chosen because, more than the others, they conformed to the ideal conception that had already been formed of that kind of reality. For example, Garofalo, at the beginning of his *Criminologie,* demonstrates extremely well that the point of departure for that science should be 'the sociological notion of crime'.[14] Yet, in order to build up this notion, he does not compare indiscriminately all the actions which in different types of society have been repressed by regular punishment, but only certain of them, namely those which offend the normal and unchangeable elements in the moral sense. As for those moral sentiments which have disappeared as a result of evolution, for him they were apparently not grounded in the nature of things for the simple reason that they did not succeed in surviving. Consequently the acts which have been deemed criminal because they violated those sentiments seemed to him to have merited this label only through chance circumstances of a more or less pathological kind. But he proceeds to make this elimination by virtue of a very personal conception of morality. He starts from the idea that moral evolution, considered at the source or its close proximity, carries along with it all sorts of deposits and impurities which it then progressively eliminates; only today has it succeeded in ridding itself of all the extraneous elements which at the beginning troubled its course. But this principle is neither a self-evident axiom nor a demonstrated truth: it is only a hypothesis, which indeed nothing justifies. The variable elements of the moral sense are no less founded in the nature of things than those that are immutable; the variations through which the former elements have passed evidence the fact that the things themselves have varied. In zoology those forms peculiar to the lower species are not considered any less natural than those which recur at all

levels on the scale of animal development. Similarly, those actions condemned as crimes by primitive societies, but which have since lost that label, are really criminal in relation to those societies just as much as those we continue to repress today. The former crimes correspond to the changing conditions of social life, the latter to unchanging conditions, but the first are no more artificial than the rest.

More can be added to this: even if these acts had wrongly assumed a criminal character, they nevertheless should not be drastically separated from the others. The pathological forms of a phenomenon are no different in nature from the normal ones, and consequently it is necessary to observe both kinds in order to determine what that nature is. Sickness is not opposed to health; they are two varieties of the same species and each throws light on the other. This is a rule long recognised and practised both in biology and psychology, and one which the sociologist is no less under an obligation to respect. Unless one allows that the same phenomenon can be due first to one cause and then to another – which is to deny the principle of causality – the causes which imprint upon an action, albeit abnormally, the distinctive mark of a crime, cannot differ in kind from those which normally produce the same effect. They are distinguishable only in degree, or because they are not operating in the same set of circumstances. The abnormal crime therefore continues to be a crime and must consequently enter into the definition of crime. But what happens? Thus Garofalo takes for the *genus* what is only the species or merely a simple variation. The facts to which his formulation of criminality are applicable represent only a tiny minority among those which should be included. His formulation does not fit religious crimes, or crimes against etiquette, ceremonial or tradition, etc., which, although they have disappeared from our modern legal codes, on the contrary almost entirely fill the penal law of past societies.

The same error of method causes certain observers to deny to savages any kind of morality.[15] They start from the idea that our morality is *the* morality. But it is either clearly unknown among primitive peoples or exists only in a rudimentary state, so that this definition is an arbitrary one. If we apply our rule all is changed. To decide whether a precept is a moral one or not we must investigate whether it presents the external mark of morality. This

mark consists of a widespread, repressive sanction, that is to say a condemnation by public opinion which consists of avenging any violation of the precept. Whenever we are confronted with a fact that presents this characteristic we have no right to deny its moral character, for this is proof that it is of the same nature as other moral facts. Not only are rules of this kind encountered in more primitive forms of society, but in them they are more numerous than among civilised peoples. A large number of acts which today are left to the discretion of individuals were then imposed compulsorily. We perceive into what errors we may fall if we omit to define, or define incorrectly.

But, it will be claimed, to define phenomena by their visible characteristics, is this not to attribute to superficial properties a kind of preponderance over more fundamental qualities? Is this not to turn the logical order upside down, to ground things upon their apex and not their base? Thus when crime is defined by punishment almost inevitably one runs the risk of being accused of wanting to derive crime from punishment, or, to cite a well known quotation, to see the source of shame in the scaffold rather than in the crime to be expiated. But the reproach is based upon a confusion. Since the definition, the rule for which we have just enunciated, is made at the beginnings of the science its purpose could not be to express the essence of reality; rather is it intended to equip us in order to arrive at this essence later. Its sole function is to establish the contact with things, and since these cannot be reached by the mind save from the outside, it is by externalities that it expresses them. But it does not thereby explain them; it supplies only an initial framework necessary for our explanations. It is not of course punishment that causes crime, but it is through punishment that crime, in its external aspects, is revealed to us. And it is therefore punishment that must be our starting point if we wish to understand crime.

The objection referred to above would be well founded only if these external characteristics were at the same time merely accidental, that is, if they were not linked to the basic properties of things. In these conditions science, after having pointed out the characteristics, would indeed lack the means of proceeding further. It could not penetrate deeper into reality, since there would be no connection between the surface and the depths. But, unless the principle of causality is only empty words, when clearly deter-

mined characteristics are to be found identically and without exception in all phenomena of a certain order, it is assuredly because they are closely linked to the nature of these phenomena and are joined indissolubly to them. If any given set of actions similarly presents the peculiarity of having a penal sanction attached to it, it is because there exists a close link between the punishment and the attributes constituting those actions. Consequently, however superficial these properties may be, provided they have been methodically observed, they show clearly to the scientist the path that he must follow in order to penetrate more deeply into the things under consideration. They are the prime, indispensable link in the sequence later to be unfolded by science in the course of its explanations.

Since it is through the senses that the external nature of things is revealed to us, we may therefore sum up as follows: in order to be objective science must start from sense-perceptions and not from concepts that have been formed independently from it. It is from observable data that it should derive directly the elements for its initial definition. Moreover, it is enough to call to mind what the task of scientific work is to understand that science cannot proceed otherwise. It needs concepts which express things adequately, as they are, and not as it is useful in practical living to conceive them. Concepts formed outside the sphere of science do not meet this criterion. It must therefore create new concepts and to do so must lay aside common notions and the words used to express them, returning to observations, the essential basic material for all concepts. It is from sense experience that all general ideas arise, whether they be true or false, scientific or unscientific. The starting point for science or speculative knowledge cannot therefore be different from that for common or practical knowledge. It is only beyond this point, in the way in which this common subject matter is further elaborated, that divergences will begin to appear.
(3) But sense experience can easily be subjective. Thus it is a rule in the natural sciences to discard observable data which may be too personal to the observer, retaining exclusively those data which present a sufficient degree of objectivity. Thus the physicist substitutes for the vague impressions produced by temperature or electricity the visual representation afforded by the rise and fall of the thermometer or the voltmeter. The sociologist must needs observe the same precautions. The external characteristics where-

by he defines the object of his research must be as objective as possible.

In principle it may be postulated that social facts are more liable to be objectively represented the more completely they are detached from the individual facts by which they are manifested.

An observation is more objective the more stable the object is to which it relates. This is because the condition for any objectivity is the existence of a constant, fixed vantage point to which the representation may be related and which allows all that is variable, hence subjective, to be eliminated. If the sole reference points given are themselves variable, continually fluctuating in relationship to one another, no common measure at all exists and we have no way of distinguishing between the part of those impressions which depends on what is external and that part which is coloured by us. So long as social life has not succeeded in isolating itself from the particular events which embody it, in order that it may constitute itself a separate entity, it is precisely this difficulty which remains. As these events do not take on the same appearance each time nor from one moment to another and as social life is inseparable from them, they communicate to it their own fluctuating character. Thus social life consists of free-ranging forces which are in a constant process of change and which the observer's scrutinising gaze does not succeed in fixing mentally. The consequence is that this approach is not open to the scientist embarking upon a study of social reality. Yet we do know that social reality possesses the property of crystallising without changing its nature. Apart from the individual acts to which they give rise, collective habits are expressed in definite forms such as legal or moral rules, popular sayings, or facts of social structure, etc. As these forms exist permanently and do not change with the various applications which are made of them, they constitute a fixed object, a constant standard which is always to hand for the observer, and which leaves no room for subjective impressions or personal observations. A legal rule is what it is and there are no two ways of perceiving it. Since, from another angle, these practices are no more than social life consolidated, it is legitimate, failing indications to the contrary,[16] to study that life through these practices.

*Thus when the sociologist undertakes to investigate any order of social facts he must strive to consider them from a viewpoint where*

*they present themselves in isolation from their individual manifestations.* It is by virtue of this principle that we have studied elsewhere social solidarity, its various forms and their evolution, through the system of legal rules whereby they are expressed.[17] In the same way, if an attempt is made to distinguish and classify the different types of family according to the literary descriptions imparted by travellers and sometimes by historians, we run the risk of confusing the widely differing species and of linking types extremely dissimilar. If, on the other hand, we take as the basis of classification the legal constitution of the family, and more especially the right of succession, we have an objective criterion which, although not infallible, will nevertheless prevent many errors.[18] If we aim at a classification of different kinds of crime, the attempt must be made to reconstitute the various modes of living and the 'professional' customs in vogue in the different worlds of crime. As many criminological types will be identified as there are organisational forms. To penetrate the customs and popular beliefs we will turn to the proverbs and sayings which express them. Doubtless by such a procedure we leave outside science for the time being the concrete data of collective life. Yet, however changeable that life may be, we have no right to postulate *a priori* its incomprehensibility. But in order to proceed methodically we must establish the prime bases of the science on a solid foundation, and not on shifting sand. We must approach the social domain from those positions where the foothold for scientific investigation is the greatest possible. Only later will it be feasible to carry our research further and by progressive approaches gradually capture that fleeting reality which the human mind will perhaps never grasp completely.

**Notes**

1. Bacon, *Novum Organum,* I, p.26.
2. Ibid., I, p.17.
3. Ibid., I, p.36.
4. H. Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology,* II, p.244 (London, Williams & Norgate,1882).
5. Ibid., II, p.245.
6. This is moreover a conception which is controversial (cf. *Division du travail social,* II, 2, ss. 4).

7. Spencer, op. cit., II. p.244: 'Cooperation, then, is at once that which cannot exist without a society, and that for which a society exists.'
8. J.S. Mill, *A System of Logic,* vol. 2, book VI, ch. IX, p.496 (London, Longmans, Green Reader & Dyer, 1872): 'Political economy shows mankind as occupied solely in acquiring and consuming wealth.'
9. This trait emerges from the very expressions used by economists. They continually talk of ideas, of the ideas of utility, savings, investment and cost. (Cf. C. Gide, *Principes de l'économie politique* book III, ch. 1, ss.1; ch. 2, ss.1; ch. 3, ss. 1 [First edition, Paris, 1884].)
10. It it true that the greater complexity of social facts renders the science that relates to them more difficult. But, as compensation, precisely because sociology is the latest arrival on the scene, it is in a position to benefit from the progress realised by the lesser sciences and to learn from them. This use of previous experience cannot fail to hasten its development.
11. J. Darmsteter, *Les Prophètes d'Israël* (Paris, 1892) p.9.
12. It is in practice always the common concept and the common term which are the point of departure. Among the things that in a confused fashion this term denotes, we seek to discover whether any exist which present common external characteristics. If there are any, and if the concept formed by grouping the facts brought together in this way coincides, if not entirely (which is rare) but at least for the most part, with the common concept, it will be possible to continue to designate the former by the same common term, retaining in the science the expression used in everyday parlance. But if the difference is too considerable, if the common notion mixes up a number of different notions, the creation of new and special terms becomes a necessity.
13. It is the same absence of definition which has sometimes caused it to be stated that democracy occurred both at the beginning and the end of history. The truth is that primitive and present-day democracy are very different from each other.
14. R. Garofalo, *Criminologie* (Paris, 1888) p.2 (trans. by the author from the Italian).
15. J. Lubbock, *Origins of Civilization,* ch. VIII. More generally still, it is stated, no less inaccurately, that ancient religions are amoral or immoral. The truth is that they have their own morality. [Durkheim may have read Sir John Lubbock's work in translation. It was published in French translation by E. Barbier in 1873. Two further editions in French followed in 1877 and 1881.]
16. For example, one should have grounds to believe that, at a given moment, law no longer expressed the real state of social relationships for this substitution to be invalid.
17. Cf. *Division du travail social,* I, 1.
18. Cf. Durkheim, 'Introduction à la sociologie de la famile', *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres de Bordeaux,* 1889.

# Chapter III

# Rules for the Distinction of the Normal from the Pathological

Observation conducted according to the preceding rules mixes up two orders of facts, very dissimilar in certain respects: those that are entirely appropriate and those that should be different from what they are – normal phenomena and pathological phenomena. We have even seen that it is necessary to include both in the definition with which all research should begin. Yet if, in certain aspects, they are of the same nature, they nevertheless constitute two different varieties between which it is important to distinguish. Does science have the means available to make this distinction?

The question is of the utmost importance, for on its solution depends one's conception of the role that science, and above all the science of man, has to play. According to a theory whose exponents are recruited from the most varied schools of thought, science cannot instruct us in any way about what we ought to desire. It takes cognisance, they say, only of facts which all have the same value and the same utility; it observes, explains, but does not judge them; for it, there are none that are reprehensible. For science, good and evil do not exist. Whereas it can certainly tell us how causes produce their effects, it cannot tell us what ends should be pursued. To know not what is, but what is desirable, we must resort to the suggestions of the unconscious – sentiment, instinct, vital urge, etc., – by whatever name we call it. Science, says a writer already quoted, can well light up the world, but leaves a darkness in the human heart. The heart must create its own illumination. Thus science is stripped, or nearly, of all practical effectiveness and consequently of any real justification for its existence. For what good is it to strive after a knowledge of reality if the knowledge we acquire cannot serve us in our lives? Can we reply that by revealing to us the causes of phenomena knowledge

offers us the means of producing the causes at will, and thereby to achieve the ends our will pursues for reasons that go beyond science? But, from one point of view, every means is an end, for to set the means in motion it requires an act of the will, just as it does to achieve the end for which it prepares the way. There are always several paths leading to a given goal, and a choice must therefore be made between them. Now if science cannot assist us in choosing the best goal, how can it indicate the best path to follow to arrive at the goal? Why should it commend to us the swiftest path in preference to the most economical one, the most certain rather than the most simple one, or vice versa? If it cannot guide us in the determination of our highest ends, it is no less powerless to determine those secondary and subordinate ends we call means.

It is true that the ideological method affords an avenue of escape from this mysticism, and indeed the desire to escape from it has in part been responsible for the persistence of this method. Its devotees were certainly too rationalist to agree that human conduct did not require the guidance of reflective thought. Yet they saw in the phenomena, considered by themselves independently of any subjective data, nothing to justify their classifying them according to their practical value. It therefore seemed that the sole means of judging them was to relate them to some overriding concept. Hence the use of notions to govern the collation of facts, rather than deriving notions from them, became indispensable for any rational sociology. But we know that, in these conditions, although practice has been reflected upon, such reflection is not scientific.

The solution to the problem just posed will nevertheless allow us to lay claim to the rights of reason without falling back into ideology. For societies, as for individuals, health is good and desirable; sickness, on the other hand, is bad and must be avoided. If therefore we find an objective criterion, inherent in the facts themselves, to allow us to distinguish scientifically health from sickness in the various orders of social phenomena, science will be in a position to throw light on practical matters while remaining true to its own method. Since at present science is incapable of directly affecting the individual, it can doubtless only furnish us with general guidelines which cannot be diversified appropriately for the particular individual unless he is approached through the senses. The state known as health, in so far as it is capable of

definition, cannot apply exactly to any individual, since it can only be established for the most common circumstances, from which everyone deviates to some extent. None the less it is a valuable reference point to guide our actions. Because it must be adjusted later to fit each individual case, it does not follow that knowledge of it lacks all utility. Indeed, precisely the opposite is true, because it establishes the norm which must serve as a basis for all our practical reasoning. Under these conditions we are no longer justified in stating that thought is useless for action. Between science and art there is no longer a gulf, and one may pass from one to the other without any break in continuity. It is true that science can only concern itself with the facts through the mediation of art, but art is only the extension of science. We may even speculate whether the practical shortcomings of science must not continue to decrease as the laws it is establishing express ever more fully individual reality.

## I

Pain is commonly regarded as the index of sickness. It is certain that in general a relationship exists between these two phenomena, although one lacking uniformity and precision. There are serious physical dispositions of a painless nature, whereas minor ailments of no importance, such as that resulting from a speck of coal-dust in the eye, cause real torment. In certain cases it is even the absence of pain, or indeed the presence of positive pleasure, which is the symptom of ill-health. There is certain lack of vulnerability to pain which is pathological. In circumstances where a healthy man would be suffering, the neurasthenic would experience a sensation of enjoyment, the morbid nature of which is indisputable. Conversely, pain accompanies many conditions, such as hunger, tiredness and childbirth, which are purely physiological phenomena.

May we assert that health, consisting in the joyous development of vital energy, is recognisable when there is perfect adaptation of the organism to its environment, and on the other hand may we term sickness as all that which upsets that adaptation? But first – and we shall have to return to this point later – it is by no means demonstrated that every state of the organism corresponds to some external state. Furthermore, even if the criterion of adapta-

tion were truly distinctive of a state of health, some other criterion would be needed for it to be recognisable. In any case we should need to be informed of the principle to decide whether one particular mode of adaptation is more 'perfect' than another.

Is it according to the manner in which one mode rather than another affects our chances of survival? Health would be the state of the organism in which those chances were greatest, whereas sickness would be anything which reduced those chances. Unquestionably sickness has generally the effect of really weakening the organism. Yet sickness is not alone in being capable of producing this result. In certain lower species the reproductive functions inevitably entail death, and even in higher species carry risks with them. Yet this is normal. Old age and infancy are subject to the same effect, for both the old person and the infant are more vulnerable to the causes of destruction. But are they therefore sick persons, and must we admit that the healthy type is represented only by the adult? This would be singularly to restrict the domain of health and physiology. Moreover, if old age is already a sickness in itself, how does one distinguish between a healthy old person and a sick one? By the same reasoning menstruation would have to be classified under pathological phenomena, for by the troubles that it brings on, it increases for a woman the liability to illness. Yet how can one term unhealthy a condition whose absence or premature disappearance constitutes without question a pathological phenomenon? We argue about this question as if in a healthy organism each element, so to speak, had a useful part to play, as if every internal state corresponded exactly to some external condition and consequently contributed to maintaining the vital equilibrium and reducing the chances of dying. On the contrary it may legitimately be presumed that certain anatomical or functional arrangements serve no direct purpose, but exist simply because they are, and cannot cease, given the general conditions of life. They cannot, however, be characterised as morbid, for sickness is eminently something avoidable which is not intrinsic to the normal constitution of a living creature. It may even be true that, instead of strengthening the organism, these arrangements lower its powers of resistance and consequently increase the risk of death.

On the other hand it is by no means sure that sickness always entails the consequence by which people have sought to define it. Do not a number of illnesses exist that are too slight for us to be

able to attribute to them any perceptible effect upon the basic functions of the organism? Even among the gravest afflictions there are some whose effects are wholly innocuous, if we know how to combat them with the weapons at our command. The gastritis-prone individual who follows a good, hygienic way of living can live as long as the healthy man. Undoubtedly he is forced to take precautions, but are we not all subject to the same constraint, and can life be sustained otherwise? Each of us has his own hygiene to follow. That of the sick person differs considerably from that of his average contemporary, living in the same environment. But this may be seen to be the sole difference between them. Sickness does not always leave us at a loss, not knowing what to do, in an irremediable state of inadaptability; it merely obliges us to adapt ourselves differently from most of our fellows. Who is there to say that some sicknesses even exist which in the end are not useful to us? Smallpox, a vaccine of which we use to inoculate ourselves, is a true disease that we give ourselves voluntarily, yet it increases our chance of survival. There may be many other cases where the damage caused by the sickness is insignificant compared with the immunities that it confers upon us.

Finally and most importantly, this criterion is very often inapplicable. At the very most it can be established that the lowest mortality rate known is encountered in a particular group of individuals, but it cannot be demonstrated that an even lower rate might not be feasible. Who is to say that other conditions might not be envisaged which would have the effect of lowering it still further? The actual minimum is not therefore proof of perfect adaptation and is consequently not a reliable index of the state of health, to come back to the preceding definition. Moreover, a group with this characteristic is very difficult to constitute and to isolate from all other groups. Yet this would be necessary to be able to observe the bodily constitution of its members which is the alleged cause of their superiority. Conversely, in the case of a generally fatal illness it is evident that the probability of survival is lower, but the proof is signally more difficult to demonstrate in the case of an affliction which does not necessarily cause death. In fact there is only one objective way to prove that creatures placed in closely defined conditions have less chance of survival than others: this is to show that in fact the majority do not live as long. Now although in cases of purely individual sickness this can often be

demonstrated, it is utterly impracticable in sociology. For here we have not the criterion of reference available to the biologist, namely, the figures of the average mortality rate. We do not even know how to determine approximately the moment when a society is born and when it dies. All these problems, which even in biology are far from being clearly resolved, still remain wrapped in mystery for the sociologist. Moreover, the events occurring in social life and which are repeated almost identically in all societies of the same type, are much too diverse to be able to determine to what extent any particular one has contributed to hastening a society's final demise. In the case of individuals, as there are very many, one can select those to be compared so that they present only the same one irregularity. This factor is thus isolated from all concomitant phenomena, so that one can study the nature of its influence upon the organism. If, for example, about a thousand rheumatism sufferers taken at random exhibit a mortality rate above the average, there are good grounds for imputing this outcome to a rheumatoidal tendency. But in sociology, since each social species accounts for only a small number of individuals, the field of comparison is too limited for groupings of this kind to afford valid proof.

Lacking this factual proof, there is no alternative to deductive reasoning, whose conclusions can have no value except as subjective presumptions. We will be able to demonstrate, not that a particular occurrence does in fact weaken the social organism, but that it *should* have that effect. To do this it will be shown that the occurrence cannot fail to entail a special consequence esteemed to be harmful to society, and on these grounds it will be declared pathological. But, granted that it does bring about this consequence, it can happen that its deleterious effects are compensated, even over-compensated, by advantages that are not perceived. Moreover, only one reason will justify our deeming it to be socially injurious: it must disturb the normal operation of the social functions. Such a proof presumes that the problem has already been solved. The proof is only possible if the nature of the normal state has been determined beforehand and consequently the signs whereby normality may be recognised are already known. Could one try to construct *a priori* the normal state from scratch? There is no need to show what such a construction would be worth. This is why it happens in sociology, as in history, that the same events

are judged to be salutary or disastrous, according to the scholar's personal convictions. Thus it constantly happens that a theorist lacking religious belief identifies as a pathological phenomenon the vestiges of faith that survive among the general collapse of religious beliefs, while for the believer it is the very absence of belief which is the great social sickness. Likewise for the socialist, the present economic organisation is a fact of social abnormality, whereas for the orthodox economist it is above all the socialist tendencies which are pathological. To support his view each finds syllogisms that he esteems well founded.

The common weakness in these definitions is the attempt to reach prematurely the essence of phenomena. Thus they assume that propositions have already been demonstrated which, whether true or false, can only be proved when the progress of science is sufficiently advanced. This is nevertheless a case where we should conform to the rule already established. Instead of claiming to determine at the outset the relationship of the normal state, and the contrary state, to the vital forces, we should simply look for some immediately perceptible outward sign, but an objective one, to enable us to distinguish these two orders of facts from each other.

Every sociological phenomenon, just as every biological phenomenon, although staying essentially unchanged, can assume a different form for each particular case. Among these forms exist two kinds. The first are common to the whole species. They are to be found, if not in all, at least in most individuals. If they are not replicated exactly in all the cases where they are observed, but vary from one person to another, their variations are confined within very narrow limits. On the other hand, other forms exist which are exceptional. These are encountered only in a minority of cases, but even when they occur, most frequently they do not last the whole lifetime of an individual. They are exceptions in time as they are in space.[1] We are therefore faced with two distinct types of phenomena which must be designated by different terms. Those facts which appear in the most common forms we shall call normal, and the rest morbid or pathological. Let us agree to designate as the average type the hypothetical being which might be constituted by assembling in one entity, as a kind of individual abstraction, the most frequently occurring characteristics of the species in their most frequent forms. We may then say that the normal type

merges into the average type and that any deviation from that standard of healthiness is a morbid phenomenon. It is true that the average type cannot be delineated with the same distinctness as an individual type, since the attributes from which it is constituted are not absolutely fixed but are capable of variation. Yet it can unquestionably be constituted in this way since it is the immediate subject matter of science and blends with the generic type. The physiologist studies the functions of the average organism; the same is true of the sociologist. Once we know how to distinguish between the various social species – this question will be dealt with later – it is always possible to discover the most general form presented by a phenomenon in any given species.

It can be seen that a fact can be termed pathological only in relation to a given species. The conditions of health and sickness cannot be defined *in abstracto* or absolutely. This rule is not questioned in biology: it has never occurred to anybody to think that what is normal in a mollusc should be also for a vertebrate. Each species has its own state of health, because it has an average type peculiar to it, and the health of the lowest species is no less than that of the highest. The same principle is applicable to sociology, although it is often misunderstood. The habit, far too widespread, must be abandoned of judging an institution, a practice or a moral maxim as if they were good or bad in or by themselves for all social types without distinction.

Since the reference point for judging the state of health or sickness varies according to the species, it can vary also within the same species, if that happens to change. Thus from the purely biological viewpoint, what is normal for the savage is not always so for the civilised person and vice versa.[2] There is one order of variations above all which it is important to take into account because these occur regularly in all species: they are those which relate to age. Health for the old person is not the same as it is for the adult, just as the adult's is different from the child's. The same is likewise true of societies.[3] Thus a social fact can only be termed normal in a given species in relation to a particular phase, likewise determinate, of its development. Consequently, to know whether the term is merited for a social fact, it is not enough to observe the form in which it occurs in the majority of societies which belong to a species: we must also be careful to observe the societies at the corresponding phase of their evolution.

We may seem to have arrived merely at a definition of terms, for

we have done no more than group phenomena according to their similarities and differences and label the groups formed in this way. Yet in reality the concepts so formed, while they possess the great merit of being identifiable because of characteristics which are objective and easily perceptible, are not far removed from the notion commonly held of sickness and health. In fact, does not everybody consider sickness to be an accident, doubtless bound up with the state of being alive, but one which is not produced normally? This is what the ancient philosophers meant when they declared that sickness does not derive from the nature of things but is the product of a kind of contingent state immanent in the organism. Such a conception is assuredly the negation of all science, for sickness is no more miraculous than health, which also inheres in the nature of creatures. Yet sickness is not grounded in their normal nature, bound up with their ordinary temperament or linked to the conditions of existence upon which they usually depend. Conversely the type of health is closely joined for everybody to the type of species. We cannot conceive incontrovertibly of a species which in itself and through its own basic constitution would be incurably sick. Health is the paramount norm and consequently cannot be in any way abnormal.

It is true that health is commonly understood as a state generally preferable to sickness. But this definition is contained in the one just stated. It is not without good reason that those characteristics which have come together to form the normal type have been able to generalise themselves throughout the species. This generalisation is itself a fact requiring explanation and therefore necessitating a cause. It would be inexplicable if the most widespread forms of organisation were not also – *at least in the aggregate* – the most advantageous. How could they have sustained themselves in such a wide variety of circumstances if they did not enable the individual better to resist the causes of destruction? On the other hand, if the other forms are rarer it is plainly because – *in the average number of cases* – those individuals displaying such forms have greater difficulty in surviving. The greater frequency of the former class is thus the proof of their superiority.[4]

## II

This last observation even provides a means of verifying the results of the preceding method.

Since the generality which outwardly characterises normal phenomena, once directly established by observation, is itself an explicable phenomenon, it demands explanation. Doubtless we can have the prior conviction that it is not without a cause, but it is better to know exactly what that cause is. The normality of the phenomenon will be less open to question if it is demonstrated that the external sign whereby it was revealed to us is not merely apparent but grounded in the nature of things – if in short, we can convert this factual normality into one which exists by right. Moreover, the demonstration of this will not always consist in showing that the phenomenon is useful to the organism, although for reasons just stated this is most frequently the case. But, as previously remarked, an arrangement may happen to be normal without serving any useful purpose, simply because it inheres in the nature of a creature. Thus it would perhaps be useful for childbirth not to occasion such violent disturbances in the female organism, but this is impossible. Consequently the normality of a phenomenon can be explained only through it being bound up with the conditions of existence in the species under consideration, either as the mechanically essential effect of these conditions or as a means allowing the organism to adapt to these conditions.[5]

This proof is not merely useful as a check. We must not forget that the advantage of distinguishing the normal from the abnormal is principally to throw light upon practice. Now, in order to act in full knowledge of the facts, it is not sufficient to know what we should want, but why we should want it. Scientific propositions relating to the normal state will be more immediately applicable to individual cases when they are accompanied by the reasons for them, for then it will be more feasible to pick out those cases where it is appropriate to modify their application, and in what way.

Circumstances even exist where this verification is indispensable, because the first method, if it were applied in isolation, might lead to error. This is what occurs in transition periods when the whole species is in the process of evolving, without yet being stabilised in a new and definitive form. In that situation the only normal type extant at the time and grounded in the facts is one that relates to the past but no longer corresponds to the new conditions of existence. A fact can therefore persist through a whole species but no longer correspond to the requirements of the situation. It

therefore has only the appearance of normality, and the generality it displays is deceptive; persisting only through the force of blind habit, it is no longer the sign that the phenomenon observed is closely linked to the general conditions of collective existence. Moreover, this difficulty is peculiar to sociology. It does not exist, in a manner of speaking, for the biologist. Only very rarely do animal species require to assume unexpected forms. The only normal modifications through which they pass are those which occur regularly in each individual, principally under the influence of age. Thus they are already known or knowable, since they have already taken place in a large number of cases. Consequently at every stage in the development of the animal, and even in periods of crisis, the normal state may be ascertained. This is also still true in sociology for those societies belonging to inferior species. This is because, since a number of them have already run their complete course, the law of their normal evolution has been, or at least can be, established. But in the case of the highest and most recent societies, by definition this law is unknown, since they have not been through their whole history. The sociologist may therefore be at a loss to know whether a phenomenon is normal, since he lacks any reference point.

He can get out of this difficulty by proceeding along the lines we have just laid down. Having established by observation that the fact is general, he will trace back the conditions which determined this general character in the past and then investigate whether these conditions still pertain in the present or, on the contrary, have changed. In the first case he will be justified in treating the phenomenon as normal; in the other eventuality he will deny it that characteristic. For instance, to know whether the present economic state of the peoples of Europe, with the lack of organisation[6] that characterises it, is normal or not, we must investigate what in the past gave rise to it. If the conditions are still those appertaining to our societies, it is because the situation is normal, despite the protest that it stirs up. If, on the other hand, it is linked to that old social structure which elsewhere we have termed segmentary[7] and which, after providing the essential skeletal framework of societies, is now increasingly dying out, we shall be forced to conclude that this now constitutes a morbid state, however universal it may be. It is by the same method that all such controversial questions of this nature will have to be

resolved, such as those relating to ascertaining whether the weakening of religious belief and the development of state power are normal phenomena or not.[8]

Nevertheless this method should in no case be substituted for the previous one, nor even be the first one employed. Firstly it raises questions which require later discussion and which cannot be tackled save at an already fairly advanced stage of science. This is because, in short, it entails an almost comprehensive explanation of phenomena, since it presupposes that either their causes or their functions are determined. At the very beginning of our research it is important to be able to classify facts as normal or abnormal, except for a few exceptional cases, in order to assign physiology and pathology each to its proper domain. Next, it is in relation to the normal type that a fact must be found useful or necessary in order to be itself termed normal. Otherwise it could be demonstrated that sickness and health are indistinguishable, since the former necessarily derives from the organism suffering from it. It is only with the average organism that sickness does not sustain the same relationship. In the same way the application of a remedy, since it is useful to the sick organism, might pass for a normal phenomenon, although it is plainly abnormal, since only in abnormal circumstances does it possess this utility. This method can therefore only be used if the normal type has previously been constituted, which could only have occurred using a different procedure. Finally, and above all, if it is true that everything which is normal is useful without being necessary, it is untrue that everything which is useful is normal. We can indeed be certain that those states which have become generalised in the species are more useful than those which have continued to be exceptional. We cannot, however, be certain that they are the most useful that exist or can exist. We have no grounds for believing that all the possible combinations have been tried out in the course of the process; among those which have never been realised but are conceivable, there are perhaps some which are much more advantageous than those known to us. The notion of utility goes beyond that of the normal, and is to the normal what the genus is to the species. But it is impossible to deduce the greater from the lesser, the species from the genus, although we may discover the genus from the species, since it is contained within it. This is why, once the general nature of the phenomena has been ascertained, we

may confirm the results of the first method by demonstrating how it is useful.[9] We can then formulate the three following rules:

*(1) A social fact is normal for a given social type, viewed at a given phase of its development, when it occurs in the average society of that species, considered at the corresponding phase of its evolution.*
*(2) The results of the preceding method can be verified by demonstrating that the general character of the phenomenon is related to the general conditions of collective life in the social type under consideration.*
*(3) This verification is necessary when this fact relates to a social species which has not yet gone through its complete evolution.*

## III

We are so accustomed to resolving glibly these difficult questions and to deciding rapidly, after cursory observation and by dint of syllogisms, whether a social fact is normal or not, that this procedure will perhaps be adjudged uselessly complicated. It seems unnecessary to have to go to such lengths to distinguish sickness from health. Do we not make these distinctions every day? This is true, but it remains to be seen whether we make them appositely. The difficulty of these problems is concealed because we see the biologist resolve them with comparative ease. Yet we forget that it is much easier for him than for the sociologist to see how each phenomenon affects the strength of the organism and thereby to determine its normal or abnormal charcter with an accuracy which is adequate for all practical purposes. In sociology the complexity and the much more changing nature of the facts constrain us to take many more precautions, as is proved by the conflicting judgements on the same phenomenon emitted by the different parties concerned. To show clearly how great this circumspection must be, we shall illustrate by a few examples to what errors we are exposed when we do not constrain ourselves in this way and in how different a light the most vital phenomena appear when they are dealt with methodically.

If there is a fact whose pathological nature appears indisputable, it is crime. All criminologists agree on this score. Although they explain this pathology differently, they none the less unanimously

acknowledge it. However, the problem needs to be treated less summarily.

Let us in fact apply the rules previously laid down. Crime is not only observed in most societies of a particular species, but in all societies of all types. There is not one in which criminality does not exist, although it changes in form and the actions which are termed criminal are not everywhere the same. Yet everywhere and always there have been men who have conducted themselves in such a way as to bring down punishment upon their heads. If at least, as societies pass from lower to higher types, the crime rate (the relationship between the annual crime figures and population figures) tended to fall, we might believe that, although still remaining a normal phenomenon, crime tended to lose that character of normality. Yet there is no single ground for believing such a regression to be real. Many facts would rather seem to point to the existence of a movement in the opposite direction. From the beginning of the century statistics provide us with a means of following the progression of criminality. It has everywhere increased, and in France the increase is of the order of 300 per cent. Thus there is no phenomenon which represents more incontrovertibly all the symptoms of normality, since it appears to be closely bound up with the conditions of all collective life. To make crime a social illness would be to concede that sickness is not something accidental, but on the contrary derives in certain cases from the fundamental constitution of the living creature. This would be to erase any distinction between the physiological and the pathological. It can certainly happen that crime itself has normal forms; this is what happens, for instance, when it reaches an excessively high level. There is no doubt that this excessiveness is pathological in nature. What is normal is simply that criminality exists, provided that for each social type it does not reach or go beyond a certain level which it is perhaps not impossible to fix in conformity with the previous rules.[10]

We are faced with a conclusion which is apparently somewhat paradoxical. Let us make no mistake: to classify crime among the phenomena of normal sociology is not merely to declare that it is an inevitable though regrettable phenomenon arising from the incorrigible wickedness of men; it is to assert that it is a factor in public health, an integrative element in any healthy society. At first sight this result is so surprising that it disconcerted even

ourselves for a long time. However, once that first impression of surprise has been overcome it is not difficult to discover reasons to explain this normality and at the same time to confirm it.

In the first place, crime is normal because it is completely impossible for any society entirely free of it to exist.

Crime, as we have shown elsewhere, consists of an action which offends certain collective feelings which are especially strong and clear-cut. In any society, for actions regarded as criminal to cease, the feelings that they offend would need to be found in each individual consciousness without exception and in the degree of strength requisite to counteract the opposing feelings. Even supposing that this condition could effectively be fulfilled, crime would not thereby disappear; it would merely change in form, for the very cause which made the well-springs of criminality to dry up would immediately open up new ones.

Indeed, for the collective feelings, which the penal law of a people at a particular moment in its history protects, to penetrate individual consciousnesses that had hitherto remained closed to them, or to assume greater authority – whereas previously they had not possessed enough – they would have to acquire an intensity greater than they had had up to then. The community as a whole must feel them more keenly, for they cannot draw from any other source the additional force which enables them to bear down upon individuals who formerly were the most refractory. For murderers to disappear, the horror of bloodshed must increase in those strata of society from which murderers are recruited; but for this to happen the abhorrence must increase throughout society. Moreover, the very absence of crime would contribute directly to bringing about that result, for a sentiment appears much more respectable when it is always and uniformly respected. But we overlook the fact that these strong states of the common consciousness cannot be reinforced in this way without the weaker states, the violation of which previously gave rise to mere breaches of convention, being reinforced at the same time, for the weaker states are no more than the extension and attenuated form of the stronger ones. Thus, for example, theft and mere misappropriation of property offend the same altruistic sentiment, the respect for other people's possessions. However, this sentiment is offended less strongly by the latter action than the former. Moreover, since the average consciousness does not have suffi-

cient intensity of feeling to feel strongly about the lesser of these two offences, the latter is the object of greater tolerance. This is why the misappropriator is merely censured, while the thief is punished. But if this sentiment grows stronger, to such a degree that it extinguishes in the consciousness the tendency to theft that men possess, they will become more sensitive to these minor offences, which up to then had had only a marginal effect upon them. They will react with greater intensity against these lesser faults, which will become the object of severer condemnation, so that, from the mere moral errors that they were, some will pass into the category of crimes. For example, dishonest contracts or those fulfilled dishonestly, which only incur public censure or civil redress, will become crimes. Imagine a community of saints in an exemplary and perfect monastery. In it crime as such will be unknown, but faults that appear venial to the ordinary person will arouse the same scandal as does normal crime in ordinary consciences. If therefore that community has the power to judge and punish, it will term such acts criminal and deal with them as such. It is for the same reason that the completely honourable man judges his slightest moral failings with a severity that the mass of people reserves for acts that are truly criminal. In former times acts of violence against the person were more frequent than they are today because respect for individual dignity was weaker. As it has increased, such crimes have become less frequent, but many acts which offended against that sentiment have been incorporated into the penal code, which did not previously include them.[11]

In order to exhaust all the logically possible hypotheses, it will perhaps be asked why this unanimity should not cover all collective sentiments without exception, and why even the weakest sentiments should not evoke sufficient power to forestall any dissentient voice. The moral conscience of society would be found in its entirety in every individual, endowed with sufficient force to prevent the commission of any act offending against it, whether purely conventional failings or crimes. But such universal and absolute uniformity is utterly impossible, for the immediate physical environment in which each one of us is placed, our hereditary antecedents, the social influences upon which we depend, vary from one individual to another and consequently cause a diversity of consciences. It is impossible for everyone to be alike in this matter, by virtue of the fact that we each have our own

organic constitution and occupy different areas in space. This is why, even among lower peoples where individual originality is very little developed, such originality does however exist. Thus, since there cannot be a society in which individuals do not diverge to some extent from the collective type, it is also inevitable that among these deviations some assume a criminal character. What confers upon them this character is not the intrinsic importance of the acts but the importance which the common consciousness ascribes to them. Thus if the latter is stronger and possesses sufficient authority to make these divergences very weak in absolute terms, it will also be more sensitive and exacting. By reacting against the slightest deviations with an energy which it elsewhere employs against those what are more weighty, it endues them with the same gravity and will brand them as criminal.

Thus crime is necessary. It is linked to the basic conditions of social life, but on this very account is useful, for the conditions to which it is bound are themselves indispensable to the normal evolution of morality and law.

Indeed today we can no longer dispute the fact that not only do law and morality vary from one social type to another, but they even change within the same type if the conditions of collective existence are modified. Yet for these transformations to be made possible, the collective sentiments at the basis of morality should not prove unyielding to change, and consequently should be only moderately intense. If they were too strong, they would no longer be malleable. Any arrangement is indeed an obstacle to a new arrangement; this is even more the case the more deep-seated the original arrangement. The more strongly a structure is articulated, the more it resists modification; this is as true for functional as for anatomical patterns. If there were no crimes, this condition would not be fulfilled, for such a hypothesis presumes that collective sentiments would have attained a degree of intensity unparalleled in history. Nothing is good indefinitely and without limits. The authority which the moral consciousness enjoys must not be excessive, for otherwise no one would dare to attack it and it would petrify too easily into an immutable form. For it to evolve, individual originality must be allowed to manifest itself. But so that the originality of the idealist who dreams of transcending his era may display itself, that of the criminal, which falls short of the age, must also be possible. One does not go without the other.

Nor is this all. Beyond this indirect utility, crime itself may play a useful part in this evolution. Not only does it imply that the way to necessary changes remains open, but in certain cases it also directly prepares for these changes. Where crime exists, collective sentiments are not only in the state of plasticity necessary to assume a new form, but sometimes it even contributes to determining beforehand the shape they will take on. Indeed, how often is it only an anticipation of the morality to come, a progression towards what will be! According to Athenian law, Socrates was a criminal and his condemnation was entirely just. However, his crime – his independence of thought – was useful not only for humanity but for his country. It served to prepare a way for a new morality and a new faith, which the Athenians then needed because the traditions by which they had hitherto lived no longer corresponded to the conditions of their existence. Socrates's case is not an isloated one, for it recurs periodically in history. The freedom of thought that we at present enjoy could never have been asserted if the rules that forbade it had not been violated before they were solemnly abrogated. However, at the time the violation was a crime, since it was an offence against sentiments still keenly felt in the average consciousness. Yet this crime was useful since it was the prelude to changes which were daily becoming more necessary, Liberal philosophy has had as its precursors heretics of all kinds whom the secular arm rightly punished throught the Middle Ages and has continued to do so almost up to the present day.

From this viewpoint the fundamental facts of criminology appear to us in an entirely new light. Contrary to current ideas, the criminal no longer appears as an utterly unsociable creature, a sort of parasitic element, a foreign, unassimilable body introduced into the bosom of society.[12] He plays a normal role in social life. For its part, crime must no longer be conceived of as an evil which cannot be circumscribed closely enough. Far from there being cause for congratulation when it drops too noticeably below the normal level, this apparent progress assuredly coincides with and is linked to some social disturbance. Thus the number of crimes of assault never falls so low as it does in times of scarcity.[13] Consequently, at the same time, and as a reaction, the theory of punishment is revised, or rather should be revised. If in fact crime is a sickness, punishment is the cure for it and cannot be conceived of otherwise;

thus all the discussion aroused revolves round knowing what punishment should be to fulfil its role as a remedy. But if crime is in no way pathological, the object of punishment cannot be to cure it and its true function must be sought elsewhere.

Thus the rules previously enunciated are far from having as their sole reason to satisfy a logical formalism which lacks any great utility. This is because, on the contrary, according to whether they are applied or not, the most essential social facts totally change their character. If the example quoted is particularly cogent – and this is why we thought we should dwell upon it – there are nevertheless many others which could usefully be cited. There is no society where it is not the rule that the punishment should fit the crime – and yet for the Italian school of thought this principle is a mere invention of legal theoreticians devoid of any solid basis.[14] For these criminologists the whole institution of punishment, as it has functioned up to the present among all known peoples, is a phenomenon which goes against nature. We have already seen that for Garofalo the criminality peculiar to the lower forms of society has nothing natural about it. For the socialists it is capitalist organisation, despite its widespread nature, which constitutes a deviation from the normal state and is an organisation brought about by violence and trickery. On the other hand for Spencer it is our administrative centralisation and the extension of governmental power which are the radical vices of our societies, in spite of the fact that both have developed entirely regularly and universally over the course of history. The belief is that one is never obliged systematically to decide on the normal or abnormal character of social facts according to their degree of generality. It is always by a great display of dialectic that these questions are resolved.

However, by laying this criterion on one side, not only is one exposed to confusion and partial errors like those just discussed, but science itself becomes impossible. Indeed its immediate object is the study of the normal type, but if the most general facts can be pathological, it may well be that the normal type has never really existed. Hence what use is it to study facts? They can only confirm our prejudices and root us more deeply in our errors, since they spring from them. If punishment and responsibility, as they exist in history, are merely a product of ignorance and barbarism, what use is it to strive to know them in order to determine their normal forms? Thus the mind is led to turn away from a reality which from

then on lacks interest for us, turning in upon itself to seek the materials necessary to reconstruct that reality. For sociology to deal with facts as things, the sociologist must feel a need to learn from them. The principal purpose of any science of life, whether individual or social, is in the end to define and explain the normal state and distinguish it from the abnormal. If normality does not inhere in the things themselves, if on the contrary it is a characteristic which we impose upon them externally or, for whatever reason, refuse to do so, this salutary state of dependence on things is lost. The mind complacently faces a reality that has not much to teach it. It is no longer contained by the subject matter to which it applies itself, since in some respects it determines that subject matter. The different rules that we have established up to now are therefore closely linked. For sociology really to be a science of things, the generality of phenomena must be taken as the criterion of their normality.

Moreover, our method has the advantage of regulating action at the same time as thought. If what is deemed desirable is not the object of observation, but can and must be determined by some sort of mental calculus, no limit, in a manner of speaking, can be laid down to the free inventions of the imagination in their search for the best. For how can one assign to perfection bounds that it cannot exceed? By definition it escapes all limitations. The goal of humanity thus recedes to infinity, discouraging not a few by its very remoteness, arousing and exciting others, on the other hand, who, so as to draw a little nearer to it, hasten their steps and throw themselves into revolutionary activity. This practical dilemma is avoided if what is desirable is declared to be what is healthy, and if the state of health is something definite, inherent in things, for at the same time the extent of our effort is given and defined. There is no longer need to pursue desperately an end which recedes as we move forward; we need only to work steadily and persistently to maintain the normal state, to re-establish it if it is disturbed, and to rediscover the conditions of normality if they happen to change. The duty of the statesman is no longer to propel societies violently towards an ideal which appears attractive to him. His role is rather that of the doctor: he forestalls the outbreak of sickness by maintaining good hygiene, or when it does break out, seeks to cure it.[15]

## Notes

1. Through this we can distinguish the case of sickness from monstrosity. The second is an exception only in space; it is not met with in the average member of the species, but it lasts the whole lifetime of the individuals in which it is to be found. Yet it is clear that these two orders of facts differ only in degree and basically are of the same nature. The boundaries drawn between them are very imprecise, for sickness can also have a lasting character and abnormality can evolve. Thus in defining them we can hardly separate them rigidly. The distinction between them cannot be more categorical than that between the morphological and the physiological, since after all morbidity is abnormal in the physiological order just as monstrosity is in the anatomical order.
2. For example, the savage who had the reduced digestive tube and developed nervous system of the civilised healthy being would be considered sick in relationship to his environment.
3. This section of our argument is abridged, for we can only reiterate here regarding social facts in general what we have said elsewhere concerning the division of moral facts into the normal and abnormal. (Cf. *Division du travail social*, pp.33-9.)
4. It is true that Garofalo has attempted to distinguish the sick from the abnormal *(Criminologie,* pp.109, 110). But the sole two arguments on which he relies to make this distinction are:
   (1) The word 'sickness' always signifies something which tends to the total or partial destruction of the organism. If there is not destruction, there is a cure, but never stability, such as exists in several abnormalities. But we have just seen that the abnormal is also, in the average case, a threat to the living creature. It is true that this is not always so, but the dangers that sickness entails likewise exist only in average circumstances. As for the absence of stability allegedly distinctive of the morbid, this leaves out of account chronic illnesses and is to divide the study of monstrosities from that of the pathological. The monstrosities are permanent.
   (2) It is stated that the normal and abnormal vary according to different races, while the distinction between the physiological and the pathological is valid for all the human race. On the contrary, we have shown that what is morbid for the savage is not so for the civilised person. The conditions of physical health vary according to different environments.
5. It is true that one may speculate whether, when a phenomenon derives necessarily from the general conditions of life, this very fact does not make it useful. We cannot deal with this philosophical question, although we touch upon it a little later.
6. Cf. on this point a note we published in the *Revue philosophique* (November 1893) on 'La définition du socialisme'.

7. Segmentary societies, particularly those which have a territorial basis, are ones whose essential components correspond to territorial divisions (cf. *Division du travail social*, pp. 189 – 210).
8. In certain cases one may proceed somewhat differently and demonstrate whether a fact whose normal character is suspect justifies this suspicion by showing whether it is closely linked to the previous development of the social type under consideration, and even to the totality of social evolution in general; or on the other hand whether it contradicts both. By this means we have been able to show that the present weakening of religious beliefs and, more generally, of collective sentiments towards collective objects, is utterly normal; we have proved that such weakening becomes increasingly marked as societies evolve towards our present type, and that this type, in turn, is more developed (cf. *Division du travail social* pp.73 – 182). But basically this method is only a special case of the preceding one. For if the normality of the phenomenon has been established in this way, it is because at the same time it has been linked to the most general conditions of our collective existence. Indeed, on the one hand, if this regression of religious consciousness is more apparent as the structure of our societies becomes more precisely determinate, it is because it does not depend on any accidental cause but on the very constitution of our social environment. Moreover, on the other hand, since the special characteristics of that constitution are certainly more developed today than formerly, it is entirely normal that the phenomena that depend upon it should themselves be more developed. This method differs only from the preceding one in that the conditions which explain and justify the general character of the phenomenon have been induced and not observed directly. We know that the phenomenon relates to the nature of the social environment without knowing by what, or how, it is connected.
9. But then it will be said that the realisation of the normal type is not the highest objective that can be proposed and, in order to go beyond it, one must also go beyond the bounds of science. We need not deal with this question here *ex professo;* let us merely reply: (1) that the question is purely theoretical because in fact the normal type, a state of health, is already somewhat difficult to determine and rarely enough attained for us to exercise our imagination to discover something better; (2) that these improvements, objectively more advantageous, are not for that reason objectively desirable. For if they do not correspond to any latent or actual tendency they would add nothing to happiness and, if they *do* correspond to some tendency, it is because the normal type has not been realised; (3) finally, that, in order to improve the normal type, it must first be known. One cannot therefore in any case go beyond science except by first relying upon it.
10. From the fact that crime is a phenomenon of normal sociology it does not follow that the criminal is a person normally constituted from the biological and psychological viewpoints. The two questions

are independent of each other. This independence will be better understood when we have shown later the difference which exists between psychical and sociological facts.

11. Calumny, insults, slander, deception, etc.
12. We have ourselves committed the error of speaking of the criminal in this way through not having applied our rule (cf. *Division du travail social,* pp.395, 396).
13. But, although crime is a fact of normal sociology, it does not follow that we should not abhor it. Pain has likewise nothing desirable about it: the individual detests it just as society detests crime, and yet it is a normal physiological function. Not only does it necessarily derive from the very constitution of every living creature, but it plays a useful and irreplaceable role in life. Thus it would be a peculiar distortion to represent our thinking as an apologia for crime. We would not even have envisaged protesting against such an interpretation were we not aware of the strange accusations and misunderstandings to which one is exposed in undertaking to study moral facts objectively and to speak of them in language that is not commonly used.
14. Cf. Garofalo, *Criminologie,* pp.299.
15. From the theory developed in this chapter it has sometimes been concluded that, in our view, the upward trend in criminality during the nineteenth century was a normal phenomenon. Nothing is farther from our thoughts. Several facts which we have pointed out in connexion with suicide (cf. *le Suicide,* p.420ff.) tend, on the contrary, to cause us to believe that this development has been, in general, pathological. However, it may be that a certain increase in certain forms of criminality would be normal, for every state of civilisation has its own criminality. But on this matter one can only hypothesise.

# Chapter IV

# Rules for the Constitution of Social Types

Since a social fact can only be labelled normal or abnormal in relation to a given social species, what has been stated up to now implies that a branch of sociology must be devoted to the constitution and classification of these species.

This notion of social species has moreover the very great advantage of providing us with a middle ground between the two opposing conceptions of social life which for a long time have caused a division of opinion. I refer to the nominalism of the historians[1] and the extreme realism of the philosophers. For the historian, societies constitute so many individual types, heterogenous and not comparable with one another. Each people has its own characteristics, its special constitution, its law, its morality and its economic organisation, appropriate only to itself, and any generalisation is almost impossible. For the philosopher, on the other hand, all these special groupings, which are called tribes, cities and nations, are only contingent and provisional aggregates without any individual reality. Only humanity is real, and it is from the general attributes of human nature that all social evolution derives. Consequently, for the historians history is only a sequence of events which are linked together but do not repeat themselves; for the philosophers these same events have value and interest only as an illustration of the general laws which are inscribed in the constitution of men and which hold sway over the course of historical development. For the former what is good for one society could not be applied to others. The conditions for the state of health vary from one people to another and cannot be theoretically determined; it is a matter of practice and experience of trial and error. For the philosophers these conditions can be calculated

once and for all for the entire human race. It would therefore seem that social reality can only be the object of an abstract and vague philosophy or of purely descriptive monographs. But one escapes from this alternative once it is recognised that between the confused multitude of historical societies and the unique, although ideal, concept of humanity, there are intermediate entities: these are the social species. In the idea of species there are found joined both the unity that any truly scientific research requires and the diversity inherent in the facts, since the species is the same everywhere for all the individuals who comprise it, and yet, on the other hand, the species differ among themselves. It remains true that moral, judicial and economic institutions, etc. are infinitely variable, but the variations are not of such a nature as to be unamenable to scientific thought.

It is because Comte failed to recognise the existence of social species that he thought he could depict the progress of human societies as that of a single people 'to which would be ideally related all the successive modifications observed among separate populations'.[2] Indeed, if there exists only one single social species, individual societies can differ from each other only in degree, in the extent to which they display the constituent traits of that single species, and according to whether they express humanity more or less perfectly. If, on the contrary, social types exist which are qualitatively distinct from each other, it would be vain to seek to juxtapose them, since one cannot join them together exactly like the homogeneous segments that constitute a geometrical straight line. Thus historical development loses the ideal but simplistic unity attributed to it. It becomes fragmented, so to speak, into a myriad of sections, which, because each differs specifically from the rest, cannot be pieced together in a continuous fashion. The famous metaphor of Pascal, since taken up again by Comte, is hence devoid of truth.

But how should we set about constituting these species?

## I

At first sight there seems no other way of proceeding than to study each society in detail, making of each as exact and complete a monograph as possible, then to compare these monographs with

one another, to see how they agree or diverge, and finally, weighing the relative importance of these similarities and divergences, to classify peoples into similar or different groups. In support of this method we should note that it is the sole one acceptable for a science based on observation. In fact the species is only the sum of individual societies; how then is it to be constituted, if we do not begin by describing each one and describing it in its entirety? Is it not the rule to pass to the general only after having observed the particular, and that particular completely? This is why on occasion some have wished to defer the study of sociology until the indefinitely distant time when history, in its study of particular societies, has arrived at results sufficiently objective and definite as to admit useful comparisons to be made.

But in reality this circumspection is only scientific in appearance. It is untrue that science can formulate laws only after having reviewed all the facts they express, or arrive at categories only after having described, in their totality, the individuals that they include. The true experimental method tends rather to substitute for common facts, which only give rise to proofs when they are very numerous and which consequently allow conclusions which are always suspect, *decisive* or *crucial* facts, as Bacon said, [3] which by themselves and regardless of their number, have scientific value and interest. It is particularly necessary to proceed in this fashion when one sets about constituting genera and species. This is because to attempt an inventory of all the characteristics peculiar to an individual is an insoluble problem. Every individual is an infinity, and infinity cannot be exhausted. Should we therefore stick to the most essential properties? If so, on what principle will we then make a selection? For this a criterion is required which is beyond the capacity of the individual and which consequently even the best monographs could not provide. Without carrying matters to this extreme of rigour, we can envisage that, the more numerous the characteristics to serve as the basis for a classification, the more difficult it will also be, in view of the different ways in which these characteristics combine together in particular cases, to present similarities and distinctions which are clear-cut enough to allow the constitution of definite groups and sub-groups.

Even were a classification possible using this method, it would present a major drawback in that it would not have the usefulness it should possess. Its main purpose should be to expedite the

scientific task by substituting for an indefinite multiplicity of individuals a limited number of types. But this advantage is lost if these types can only be constituted after all individuals have been investigated and analysed in their entirety. It can hardly facilitate the research if it does no more than summarise research already carried out. It will only be really useful if it allows us to classify characteristics other than those which serve as a basis for it, and if it furnishes us with a framework for future facts. Its role is to supply us with reference points to which we can add observations other than those which these reference points have already provided. But for this the classification must be made, not on the basis of a complete inventory of all individual characteristics, but according to a small number of them, carefully selected. Under these conditions it will not only serve to reduce to some order knowledge already discovered, but also to produce more. It will spare the observer from following up many lines of enquiry because it will serve as a guide. Thus once a classification has been established according to this principle, in order to know whether a fact is general throughout a particular species, it will be unnecessary to have observed all societies belonging to this species – the study of a few will suffice. In many cases even one observation well conducted will be enough, just as often an experiment efficiently carried out is sufficient to establish a law.

We must therefore select for our classification characteristics which are particularly essential. It is true that these cannot be known until the explanation of the facts is sufficiently advanced. These two operations of science are linked, depending upon each other for progress. However, without plunging too deeply into the study of the facts, it is not difficult to surmise in what area to look for the characteristic properties of social types. We know that societies are made up of a number of parts added on to each other. Since the nature of any composite necessarily depends upon the nature and number of the elements that go to make it up and the way in which these are combined, these characteristics are plainly those which we must take as our basis. It will be seen later that it is on them that the general facts of social life depend. Moreover, as they are of a morphological order, one might term that part of sociology whose task it is to constitute and classify social types *social morphology*.

The principle of this classification can be defined even more

precisely. It is known in fact that the constituent parts of every society are themselves societies of a simpler kind. A people is produced by the combination of two or more peoples that have preceded it. If therefore we knew the simplest society that ever existed, in order to make our classification we should only have to follow the way in which these simple societies joined together and how these new composites also combined.

## II

Spencer understood very well that the methodical classification of social types could have no other basis.

'We have seen', he stated, 'that social evolution begins with small, simple aggregates, that it progresses by the clustering of these into larger aggregates, and that after consolidating such clusters are united with others like themselves into still larger aggregates. Our classification then must begin with the societies of the first or simplest order'.[4]

Unfortunately, to put this principle into practice we should have to begin by defining precisely what is understood by a simple society. Now, not only does Spencer fail to give this definition, but he esteems it almost impossible to do so.[5] This is in fact because simplicity, as he understands it, consists essentially of a certain rudimentariness of organisation. Now it is not easy to state precisely at what moment the social organisation is crude enough to be termed simple; it is a matter of judgement. Thus the formula he gives for it is so vague that it can fit all sorts of societies. 'Our only course', he affirms, 'is to regard as a simple society, one which forms a single working whole unsubjected to any other end and of which the parts cooperate, with or without a regulating centre, for certain public ends'.[6] But there are a number of peoples which satisfy this condition. The result is that he mixes somewhat at random under this same heading all the least civilised societies. With such a starting point one can perhaps imagine what the rest of his classification is like. Grouped together in the most astonishing confusion are societies of the most diverse character: the Homeric Greeks are placed alongside the fiefdoms of the tenth century and below the Bechuanas, the Zulus and the Fijians; the Athenian confederation alongside the fiefdoms of thirteenth-

century France and below the Iroquois and the Araucanians.

The term 'simplicity' can only have a precise meaning when it signifies a complete absence of any component elements. A simple society must therefore be understood as one which does not include others simpler than itself, which at present not only contains merely one single segment, but which presents no trace of any previous segmentation. The *horde*, as we have defined it elsewhere,[7] corresponds exactly to this definition. It is a social aggregate which does not include – and never has included – within it any other more elementary aggregate, but which can be split up directly into individuals. These do not form within the main group special sub-groups different from it, but are juxtaposed like atoms. One realises that there can be no more simple society; it is the protoplasm of the social domain and consequently the natural basis for any classification.

It is true that there does not perhaps exist any historical society corresponding exactly to this description, but (as we have shown in the book already cited) we know of very many which have been formed directly and without any intermediary by a combination or hordes. When the horde thus becomes a social segment instead of being the whole society, it changes its name and becomes the clan, whilst retaining the same constituent features. Indeed the clan is a social aggregate which cannot be split up into any other more limited in size. Perhaps it will be remarked that generally, where it is still observable today, it comprises a number of individual families. But firstly, for reasons that we cannot expatiate upon here, we believe that the formation of these small family groups postdates the clan; and secondly, precisely speaking, these do not constitute social segments because they are not political divisions. Everywhere that it is met with, the clan constitutes the ultimate division of this kind. Consequently, even if we possessed no other facts on which to postulate the existence of the horde – and other facts exist which one day we shall have the opportunity to set out – the existence of the clan, that is to say of a society formed by the linking up of hordes, justifies our supposition that at first there were simpler societies which are reducible to the horde proper, thus making the latter the root source from which all social species have sprung.

Once this notion of the horde or single-segment society has been assumed – whether it is conceived of as an historical reality or as a

scientific postulate – we possess the necessary support on which to construct the complete scale of social types. We can distinguish as many basic types as there exist ways in which hordes combine with one another to give birth to new societies, which in turn combine among themselves. We shall first encounter aggregates formed by a mere replication of hordes or clans (to give them their new name), without these clans being associated among themselves in such a way as to form intermediate groups within the total group which includes each and every one of them. They are merely juxtaposed like individuals within the horde. One finds examples of these societies, which might be termed *simple polysegments*, among certain Iroquois and Australian tribes. The *arch* or Kabyle tribe has the same character; it is a union of clans fixed in the form of villages. Very probably there was a moment in history when the Roman *curia* and the Athenian *phratry* was a society of this kind. Above them would be societies formed by the coming together of the societies of the former species, that is to say, *polysegmentary societies of simple composition*. Such is the character of the Iroquois confederation and that formed by the union of Kabyle tribes. The same is true originally of each of the three primitive tribes whose association later gave birth to the city state of Rome. Next one would find *polysegmentary societies of double composition*, which arise from the juxtaposition or fusion of several polysegmentary societies of simple composition. Such is the city, an aggregate of tribes which are themselves the aggregates of *curiae*, which in their turn break down into *gentes* or clans; such also is the Germanic tribe, with its count's districts which subdivide into their 'hundreds', which in their turn have as their ultimate unit the clan, which has become a village.

We need not develop at greater length these few points, since there can be no question here of undertaking a classification of societies. It is too complex a problem to be dealt with incidentally in that way; on the contrary, it supposes a whole gamut of long and detailed investigations. We merely wished, through a few examples, to clarify the ideas and demonstrate how the principle behind the method should be applied. Even what has been expounded should not be considered as constituting a complete classification of lower societies. We have simplified matters somewhat, in the interests of greater clarity. We have in fact assumed that every

higher type of society was formed by a combination of societies of the same type, that is, of the type immediately below. But it is not impossible for societies of different species, situated at different levels on the genealogical tree of social types, to combine in such a way as to form new species. At least one case of this is known: that of the Roman Empire, which included within it peoples of the most diverse kind.[8]

But once these types have been constituted, we need to distinguish different varieties in each one, according to whether the segmentary societies which serve to form a new society retain a certain individuality or, on the contrary, are absorbed in the total mass. It is understandable that social phenomena should vary not only according to the nature of their component elements, but according to the way in which they are combined. Above all they must be very different, according to whether each of the subgroups retains its own immediate life or whether they are all caught up in the general life, which varies according to their degree of concentration. Consequently we shall have to investigate whether, at any particular moment, a complete coalescence of the segments takes place. This will be discernible from the fact that the original component segments of a society will no longer affect its administrative and political organisation. From this viewpoint the city state is sharply differentiated from the Germanic tribes. With the latter the organisation based on the clan was maintained, although blurred in form, until the end of their history, while in Rome and Athens the *gentes* and the γένη ceased very early on to be political divisions and became private groupings.

Within the framework elaborated in this way one can seek to introduce new distinctions, according to secondary morphological traits. However, for reasons we shall give later, we scarcely believe it possible or useful to go beyond the general distinctions which have just been indicated. Furthermore, we need not enter into detail. It suffices to have postulated the principle of classification, which can be enunciated as follows:

*We shall begin by classifying societies according to the degree of organisation they manifest, taking as a base the perfectly simple society or the single-segment society. Within these classes different varieties will be distinguished, according to whether a complete coalescence of the initial segments takes place.*

## III

These rules implicitly answer a question that the reader may have asked himself when we spoke of social species as if they existed, without having directly established their existence. The proof of existence is contained in the principle itself of the method which has just been expounded.

We have just seen that societies are only different combinations of one and the same original society. But the same element can only combine with others, and the combinations deriving from it can in their turn only do so in a limited number of ways. This is particularly the case when the constituent elements are very few, as with social segments. The scale of possible combinations is therefore finite, and consequently most of them, at the very least, must replicate themselves. Hence social species exist. Moreover, although it is still possible for certain of these combinations to occur only once, this does not prevent their being a species. Only we can say that in cases of this kind the species is made up of one individual entity.[9]

Thus there are social species for the same reason as there are biological ones. The latter are due to the fact that the organisms are only varied combinations of the same anatomical unity. However, from this viewpoint, there is a great difference between the two domains. With animals, a special factor, that of reproduction, imparts to specific characteristics a force of resistance that is lacking elsewhere. These specific characteristics, because they are common to a whole line of ancestors, are much more strongly rooted in the organism. They are therefore not easily whittled away by the action of particular individual environments but remain consistently uniform in spite of the diverse external circumstances. An inner force perpetuates them despite countervailing factors in favour of variation which may come from outside. This force is that of hereditary habits. This is why biological characteristics are clearly defined and can be precisely determined. In the social kingdom this internal force does not exist. Characteristics cannot be reinforced by the succeeding generation because they last only for a generation. In fact as a rule the societies that are produced are of a different species from those which generated them, because the latter, by combining, give rise to an entirely fresh organisational pattern. Only the act of

colonisation is comparable to reproduction by germination; even so, for the comparison to be exact, the group of colonisers should not mix with some other society of a different species or variety. The distinctive attributes of the species do not therefore receive reinforcement from heredity to enable them to resist individual variations. But they are modified and take on countless nuances through the action of circumstances. Thus, in seeking out these attributes, once all the variants which conceal them have been peeled away, we are often left with a rather indeterminate residue. This indeterminate state is naturally increased the greater the complexity of the characteristics, for the more complex a thing, the more the possible number of combinations which can be formed by its constituent parts. The end result is that the specific type, beyond the most general and simple characteristics, is not so clearly delineated as in biology.[10]

**Notes**

1. I term it this because it has occurred frequently among historians, but I do not mean that it is to be found among all of them.
2. *Cours de philosophie positive*, IV, p.263.
3. *Novum Organum*, II, ss. 36.
4. Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, vol.I, part. II, ch. X, p.570.
5. Ibid, p. 570, 'We cannot in all cases say with precision what constitutes a single society'.
6. Ibid. 571.
7. *Division du travail social*, p. 189.
8. However, it is likely that in general the distance that separated societies composing it could not be too great; otherwise no social communality could exist between them.
9. Was this not the case with the Roman Empire, which indeed appears to have no parallel in history?
10. In writing this chapter for the first edition of this book we said nothing about the method which consists in classifying societies according to their state of civilisation. At the time there did not exist classifications of that kind which would have been put forward by reputable sociologists, save that perhaps of Comte, which was very clearly archaic. Vierkandt ('Die Kulturtypen der Menschheit' in *Archiv f. Anthropogie*, 1898), A. Sutherland (*The Origin and Growth*

*of the Moral Instinct*, 2 vols, London, 1898) and Steinmetz (Classification des types sociaux', in *Année sociologique*, III, pp. 43–147) represent several attempts that since then have been made in this direction. Nevertheless we shall not stop to discuss them because they do not answer the problem posed in this chapter. One finds classified, not social species, but historical phases, something which is vastly different. From its origins France has passed through very different forms of civilisation. It began by being agricultural, to pass then to an industry of trades and small businesses, then to manufacturing, and finally to large-scale industry. One cannot admit that the same individual collectivity can change its species three or four times. A species must be defined by more permanent features. The economic or technological state, etc. presents phenomena which are too unstable and complex to provide a basis for classification. It is even extremely likely that the same industrial, scientific and artistic civilisation is to be found in societies whose hereditary constitution is very different. Japan may borrow from us our arts, our industry and even our political organisation, but it will not cease to belong to a different social species from that of France and Germany. It must be added that these attempts, although carried out by sociologists of worth, have given only results that are vague, disputable and of little utility.

# Chapter V

# Rules for the Explanation of Social Facts

The constitution of species is above all a means of grouping the facts so as to facilitate their interpretation, but social morphology is only one step towards the truly explanatory part of the science. What is the method appropriate for explanation?

## I

Most sociologists believe they have accounted for phenomena once they have demonstrated the purpose they serve and the role they play. They reason as if phenomena existed solely for this role and had no determining cause save a clear or vague sense of the services they are called upon to render. This is why it is thought that all that is needful has been said to make them intelligible when it has been established that these services are real and that the social need they satisfy has been demonstrated. Thus Comte relates all the drive for progress of the human species to this basic tendency, 'which directly impels man continually to improve his condition in all respects',[1] whereas Spencer relates it to the need for greater happiness. It is by virtue of this principle that Spencer explains the formation of society as a function of the advantages which flow from co-operation, the institution of government by the utility which springs from regulating military co-operation,[2] and the transformations which the family has undergone from the need for a more perfect reconciliation of the interests of parents, children and society.

But this method confuses two very different questions. To demonstrate the utility of a fact does not explain its origins, nor

how it is what it is. The uses which it serves presume the specific properties characteristic of it, but do not create it. Our need for things cannot cause them to be of a particular nature; consequently, that need cannot produce them out of nothing, conferring in this way existence upon them. They spring from causes of another kind. The feeling we have regarding their utility can stimulate us to set these causes in motion and draw upon the effects they bring in their train, but it cannot conjure up these results out of nothing. This proposition is self-evident so long as only material or even psychological phenomena are being considered. It would also not be disputed in sociology if the social facts, because of their total lack of material substance, did not appear – wrongly, moreover – bereft of intrinsic reality. Since we view them as purely mental configurations, provided they are found to be useful, as soon as the idea of them occurs to us they seem to be self-generating. But since each fact is a force which prevails over the force of the individual and possesses its own nature, to bring a fact into existence it cannot suffice to have merely the desire or the will to engender it. Prior forces must exist, capable of producing this firmly established force, as well as natures capable of producing this special nature. Only under these conditions can facts be created. To revive the family spirit where it has grown weak, it is not enough for everybody to realise its advantages; we must set directly in operation those causes which alone can engender it. To endow a government with the authority it requires, it is not enough to feel the need for this. We must address ourselves to the sole sources from which all authority is derived: the establishment of traditions, a common spirit, etc. For this we must retrace our steps farther back along the chain of cause and effect until we find a point at which human action can effectively intervene.

What clearly demonstrates the duality of these two avenues of research is that a fact can exist without serving any purpose, either because it has never been used to further any vital goal or because, having once been of use, it has lost all utility but continues to exist merely through force of custom. There are even more instances of such survivals in society than in the human organism. There are even cases where a practice or a social institution changes its functions without for this reason changing its nature. The rule of *is pater est quem justae nuptiae declarant* has remained substantially the same in our legal code as it was in ancient Roman law. But

while its purpose was to safeguard the property rights of the father over children born of his legitimate wife, it is much more the rights of the children that it protects today. The swearing of an oath began by being a kind of judicial ordeal before it became simply a solemn and impressive form of attestation. The religious dogmas of Christianity have not changed for centuries, but the role they play in our modern societies is no longer the same as in the Middle Ages. Thus words serve to express new ideas without their contexture changing. Moreover, it is a proposition true in sociology as in biology, that the organ is independent of its function, i.e. while staying the same it can serve different ends. Thus the causes which give rise to its existence are independent of the ends it serves.

Yet we do not mean that the tendencies, needs and desires of men never actively intervene in social evolution. On the contrary, it is certain that, according to the way they make an impact upon the conditions on which a fact depends, they can hasten or retard development. Yet, apart from the fact that they can never create something out of nothing, their intervention itself, regardless of its effects, can only occur by virtue of efficient causes. Indeed, a tendency cannot, even to this limited extent, contribute to the production of a new phenomenon unless it is itself new, whether constituted absolutely or arising from some transformation of a previous tendency. For unless we postulate a truly providential harmony established beforehand, we could not admit that from his origins man carried within him in potential all the tendencies whose opportuneness would be felt as evolution progressed, each one ready to be awakened when the circumstances called for it. Furthermore, a tendency is also a thing; thus it cannot arise or be modified for the sole reason that we deem it useful. It is a force possessing its own nature. For that nature to come into existence or be changed, it is not enough for us to find advantage in this occurring. To effect such changes causes must come into play which require them physically.

For example, we have explained the constant development of the social division of labour by showing that it is necessary in order for man to sustain himself in the new conditions of existence in which he is placed as he advances in history. We have therefore attributed to the tendency which is somewhat improperly termed the instinct of self-preservation an important role in our explana-

tion. But in the first place the tendency alone could not account for even the most rudimentary form of specialisation. It can accomplish nothing if the conditions on which this phenomenon depends are not already realised, that is, if individual differences have not sufficiently increased through the progressive state of indetermination of the common consciousness and hereditary influences.[3] The division of labour must even have begun already to occur for its utility to be perceived and its need to be felt. The mere development of individual differences, implying a greater diversity of tastes and abilities, had necessarily to bring about this first consequence. Moreover, the instinct of self-preservation did not come by itself and without cause to fertilise this first germ of specialisation. If it directed first itself and then us into this new path, it is because the course it followed and caused us to follow beforehand was as if blocked. This was because the greater intensity of the struggle for existence brought about by the greater concentration of societies rendered increasingly difficult the survival of those individuals who continued to devote themselves to more unspecialised tasks. Thus a change of direction was necessary. On the other hand if it turned itself, and for preference turned our activity, towards an ever increasing division of labour, it was also because it was the path of least resistance. The other possible solutions were emigration, suicide or crime. Now, on average, the ties that bind us to our country, to life and to feeling for our fellows are stronger and more resistant sentiments than the habits which can deter us from narrower specialisation. Thus these habits had inevitably to give ground as every advance occurred. Thus, since we are ready to allow for human needs in sociological explanations, we need not revert, even partially, to teleology. For these needs can have no influence over social evolution unless they themselves evolve, and the changes through which they pass can only be explained by causes which are in no way final.

What is even more convincing that the foregoing argument is the study of how social facts work out in practice. Where teleology rules, there rules also a fair margin of contingency, for there are no ends – and even fewer means – which necessarily influence all men, even supposing they are placed in the same circumstances. Given the same environment, each individual, according to his temperament, adapts himself to it in the way he pleases and which he prefers to all others. The one will seek to change it so that it

better suits his needs; the other will prefer to change himself and to moderate his desires. Thus to arrive at the same goal, many different routes can be, and in reality are, followed. If then it were true that historical development occurred because of ends felt either clearly or obscurely, social facts would have to present an infinite diversity and all comparison would almost be impossible. But the opposite is true. Undoubtedly external events, the links between which constitute the superficial part of social life, vary from one people to another. Yet in this way each individual has his own history, although the bases of physical and social organisation remain the same for all. If, in fact, one comes even a little into contact with social phenomena, one is on the contrary surprised at the outstanding regularity with which they recur in similar circumstances. Even the most trivial and apparently most puerile practices are repeated with the most astonishing uniformity. A marriage ceremony, seemingly purely symbolic, such as the abduction of the bride-to-be, is found to be identical everywhere that a certain type of family exists, which itself is lined to a whole political organisation. The most bizarre customs, such as the 'couvade', the levirate, exogamy, etc. are to be observed in the most diverse peoples and are symptomatic of a certain social state. The right to make a will appears at a specific phase of history and, according to the severity of the restrictions which limit it, we can tell at what stage of social evolution we have arrived. It would be easy to multiply such examples. But the widespread character of collective forms would be inexplicable if final causes held in sociology the preponderance attributed to them.

*Therefore when one undertakes to explain a social phenomenon the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfils must be investigated separately.* We use the word 'function' in preference to 'end' or 'goal' precisely because social phenomena generally do not exist for the usefulness of the results they produce. We must determine whether there is a correspondence between the fact being considered and the general needs of the social organism, and in what this correspondence consists, without seeking to know whether it was intentional or not. All such questions of intention are, moreover, too subjective to be dealt with scientifically.

Not only must these two kinds of problems be dissociated from each other, but it is generally appropriate to deal with the first kind before the second. This order of precedence corresponds to

that of the facts. It is natural to seek the cause of a phenomenon before attempting to determine its effects. This method is all the more logical because the first question, once resolved, will often help to answer the second. Indeed, the solid link which joins cause to effect is of a reciprocal character which has not been sufficiently recognised. Undoubtedly the effect cannot exist without its cause, but the latter, in turn, requires its effect. It is from the cause that the effect derives its energy, but on occasion it also restores energy to the cause and consequently cannot disappear without the cause being affected.[4] For example, the social reaction which constitutes punishment is due to the intensity of the collective sentiments that crime offends. On the other hand it serves the useful function of maintaining those sentiments at the same level of intensity, for they could not fail to weaken if the offences committed against them remained unpunished. [5] Likewise, as the social environment becomes more complex and unstable, traditions and accepted beliefs are shaken and take on a more indeterminate and flexible character, whilst faculties of reflection develop. These same faculties are indispensable for societies and individuals to adapt themselves to a more mobile and complex environment.[6] As men are obliged to work more intensively, the products of their labour become more numerous and better in quality; but this increase in abundance and quality of the products is necessary to compensate for the effort that this more considerable labour entails.[7] Thus, far from the cause of social phenomena consisting of a mental anticipation of the function they are called upon to fulfil, this function consists on the contrary, in a number of cases at least, in maintaining the pre-existent cause from which the phenomena derive. We will therefore discover more easily the function if the cause is already known.

If we must proceed only at a second stage to the determination of the function, it is none the less necessary for the complete explanation of the phenomenon. Indeed, if the utility of a fact is not what causes its existence, it must generally be useful to continue to survive. If it lacks utility, that very reason suffices to make it harmful, since in that case it requires effort but brings in no return. Thus if the general run of social phenomena had this parasitic character, the economy of the organism would be in deficit, and social life would be impossible. Consequently, to provide a satisfactory explanation of social life we need to show

how the phenomena which are its substance come together to place society in harmony with itself and with the outside world. Undoubtedly the present formula which defines life as a correspondence between the internal and the external environments is only approximate. Yet in general it remains true; thus to explain a fact which is vital, it is not enough to show the cause on which it depends. We must also – at least in most cases – discover the part that it plays in the establishment of that general harmony.

## II

Having distinguished between these two questions, we must determine the method whereby they must be resolved.

At the same time as being teleological, the method of explanation generally followed by sociologists is essentially psychological. The two tendencies are closely linked. Indeed, if society is only a system of means set up by men to achieve certain ends, these ends can only be individual, for before society existed there could only exist individuals. It is therefore from the individual that emanate the ideas and needs which have determined the formation of societies. If it is from him that everything comes, it is necessarily through him that everything must be explained. Moreover, in society there is nothing save individual consciousnesses, and it is consequently in these that is to be found the source of all social evolution. Thus sociological laws can only be a corollary of the more general laws of psychology. The ultimate explanation of collective life will consist in demonstrating how it derives from human nature in general, either by direct deduction from it without any preliminary observation, or by establishing links after having observed human nature.

These expressions are almost word for word those used by Auguste Comte to characterise his method. 'Since the social phenomenon', he asserts, 'conceived of in its totality, *is only basically a simple development of humanity without any creation of faculties at all,* as I have established above, the whole framework of effects that sociological observation can successively uncover will therefore necessarily be found, at least in embryo, in that primordial type which biology has constructed beforehand for sociology'.[8] This is because, in his view, the dominant fact of social

life is progress, and because progress furthermore depends on a factor exclusively psychical in kind: the tendency that impels man to develop his nature more and more. Social facts may even derive so immediately from human nature that, during the initial stages of history, they could be directly deduced from it without having recourse to observation.[9] It is true, as Comte concedes, that it is impossible to apply this deductive method to the more advanced phases of evolution. This impossibility is purely of a practical kind. It arises because the distance from the points of departure and arrival becomes too considerable for the human mind, which, if it undertook to traverse it without a guide, would run the risk of going astray.[10] But the relationship between the basic laws of human nature and the ultimate results of progress is none the less capable of analysis. The most complex forms of civilisation are only a developed kind of psychical life. Thus, even if psychological theories cannot suffice as premises for sociological reasoning, they are the touchstone which alone permits us to test the validity of propositions inductively established. 'No law of social succession', declares Comte, 'which has been elaborated with all the authority possible by means of the historical method, should be finally accepted before it has been rationally linked, directly or indirectly, but always irrefutably, to the positivist theory of human nature'.[11] Psychology will therefore always have the last word.

This is likewise the method followed by Spencer. In fact, according to him, the two primary factors of social phenomena are the external environment and the physical and moral constitution of the individual.[12] Now the first factor can only influence society through the second one, which is thus the essential motivating power for social evolution. Society arises to allow the individual to realise his own nature, and all the transformations through which it has passed have no other purpose than to make this act of self-realisation easier and more complete. It is by virtue of this principle that, before proceeding to any research into social organisation, Spencer thought it necessary to devote almost all the first volume of his *Principles of Sociology* to the study of primitive man from the physical, emotional and intellectual viewpoint. 'The science of sociology', he states, 'sets out with social units, conditioned as we have seen, constituted physically, emotionally and intellectually and possessed of certain early acquired notions and correlative feelings'.[13] And it is in two of these sentiments, fear of

the living and fear of the dead, that he finds the origin of political and religious government.[14] It is true that he admits that once it has been constituted, society reacts upon individuals.[15] But it does not follow that society has the power to engender directly the smallest social fact; from this viewpoint it has causal effectiveness only through the mediation of the changes that it brings about in the individual. Thus it is always from human nature, whether primitive or derived, that everything arises. Moreover, the influence which the body social exerts upon its members can have nothing specific about it, since political ends are nothing in themselves, but merely the summary expression of individual ends.[16] Social influence can therefore only be a kind of consequent effect of private activity upon itself. Above all, it is not possible to see of what it may consist in industrial societies whose purpose is precisely to deliver the individual over to his natural impulses by ridding him of all social constraint.

This principle is not only at the basis of these great doctrines of general sociology, but also inspires a very great number of particular theories. Thus domestic organisation is commonly explained by the feelings that parents have for their children and vice versa; the institution of marriage by the advantages that it offers husband and wife and their descendants; punishment by the anger engendered in the individual through any serious encroachment upon his interests. The whole of economic life, as conceived of and explained by economists, particularly those of the orthodox school, hangs in the end upon a purely individual factor, the desire for wealth. If we take morality, the basis of ethics is the duties of the individual towards himself. And in religion one can see a product of the impressions that the great forces of nature or certain outstanding personalities awaken in man, etc., etc.

But such a method is not applicable to sociological phenomena unless one distorts their nature. For proof of this we need only refer to the definition we have given. Since their essential characteristic is the power they possess to exert outside pressure on individual consciousnesses, this shows that they do not derive from these consciousnesses and that consequently sociology is not a corollary of psychology. This constraining power attests to the fact that they express a nature different from our own, since they only penetrate into us by force or at the very least by bearing down more or less heavily upon us. If social life were no more than an

extension of the individual, we would not see it return to its origin and invade the individual consciousness so precipitately. The authority to which the individual bows when he acts, thinks or feels socially dominates him to such a degree because it is a product of forces which transcend him and for which he consequently cannot account. It is not from within himself that can come the external pressure which he undergoes; it is therefore not what is happening within himself which can explain it. It is true that we are not incapable of placing constraints upon ourselves; we can restrain our tendencies, our habits, even our instincts, and halt their development by an act of inhibition. But inhibitive movements must not be confused with those which make up social constraint. The process of inhibitive movements is centrifugal; but the latter are centripetal. The former are worked out in the individual consciousness and then tend to manifest themselves externally; the latter are at first external to the individual, whom they tend afterwards to shape from the outside in their own image. Inhibition is, if one likes, the means by which social constraint produces its psychical effects, but is not itself that constraint.

Now, once the individual is ruled out, only society remains. It is therefore in the nature of society itself that we must seek the explanation of social life. We can conceive that, since it transcends infinitely the individual both in time and space, it is capable of imposing upon him the ways of acting and thinking that it has consecrated by its authority. This pressure, which is the distinctive sign of social facts, is that which all exert upon each individual.

But it will be argued that since the sole elements of which society is composed are individuals, the primary origin of sociological phenomena cannot be other than psychological. Reasoning in this way, we can just as easily establish that biological phenomena are explained analytically by inorganic phenomena. It is indeed certain that in the living cell there are only molecules of crude matter. But they are in association, and it is this association which is the cause of the new phenomena which characterise life, even the germ of which it is impossible to find in a single one of these associated elements. This is because the whole does not equal the sum of its parts; it is something different, whose properties differ from those displayed by the parts from which it is formed. Association is not, as has sometimes been believed, a phenomenon infertile in itself, which consists merely in juxtaposing

externally facts already given and properties already constituted. On the contrary, is it not the source of all the successive innovations that have occurred in the course of the general evolution of things? What differences exist between the lower organisms and others, between the organised living creature and the mere protoplasm, between the latter and the inorganic molecules of which it is composed, if it is not differences in association? All these beings, in the last analysis, split up into elements of the same nature; but these elements are in one place juxtaposed, in another associated. Here they are associated in one way, there in another. We are even justified in wondering whether this law does not even extend to the mineral world, and whether the differences which separate inorganic bodies do not have the same origin.

By virtue of this principle, society is not the mere sum of individuals, but the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics. Undoubtedly no collective entity can be produced if there are no individual consciousnesses: this is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. In addition, these consciousnesses must be associated and combined, but combined in a certain way. It is from this combination that social life arises and consequently it is this combination which explains it. By aggregating together, by interpenetrating, by fusing together, individuals give birth to a being, psychical if you will, but one which constitutes a psychical individuality of a new kind.[17] Thus it is in the nature of that individuality and not in that of its component elements that we must search for the proximate and determining causes of the facts produced in it. The group thinks, feels and acts entirely differently from the way its members would if they were isolated. If therefore we begin by studying these members separately, we will understand nothing about what is taking place in the group. In a word, there is between psychology and sociology the same break in continuity as there is between biology and the physical and chemical sciences. Consequently every time a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may rest assured that the explanation is false.

Some will perhaps argue that, although society, once formed, is the proximate cause of social phenomena, the causes which have determined its formation are of a psychological nature. They may concede that, when individuals are associated together, their

association may give rise to a new life, but claim that this can only take place for individual reasons. But in reality, as far as one can go back in history, the fact of association is the most obligatory of all, because it is the origin of all other obligations. By reason of my birth, I am obligatorily attached to a given people. It may be said that later, once I am an adult, I acquiesce in this obligation by the mere fact that I continue to live in my own country. But what does that matter? Such acquiescence does not remove its imperative character. Pressure accepted and undergone with good grace does not cease to be pressure. Moreover, how far does such acceptance go? Firstly, it is forced, for in the immense majority of cases it is materially and morally impossible for us to shed our nationality; such a rejection is even generally declared to be apostasy. Next, the acceptance cannot relate to the past, when I was in no position to accept, but which nevertheless determines the present. I did not seek the education I received; yet this above all else roots me to my native soil. Lastly, the acceptance can have no moral value for the future, in so far as this is unknown. I do not even know all the duties which one day may be incumbent upon me in my capacity as a citizen. How then could I acquiesce in them in advance? Now, as we have shown, all that is obligatory has its origins outside the individual. Thus, provided one does not place oneself outside history, the fact of association is of the same character as the others and is consequently explicable in the same way. Furthermore, as all societies are born of other societies, with no break in continuity, we may be assured that in the whole course of social evolution there has not been a single time when individuals have really had to consult together to decide whether they would enter into collective life together, and into one sort of collective life rather than another. Such a question is only possible when we go back to the first origins of any society. But the solutions, always dubious, which can be brought to such problems could not in any case affect the method whereby the facts given in history must be treated. We have therefore no need to discuss them.

Yet our thought would be singularly misinterpreted if the conclusion was drawn from the previous remarks that sociology, in our view, should not even take into account man and his faculties. On the contrary, it is clear that the general characteristics of human nature play their part in the work of elaboration from which social life results. But it is not these which produce it or give

it its special form: they only make it possible. Collective representations, emotions and tendencies have not as their causes certain states of consciousness in individuals, but the conditions under which the body social as a whole exists. Doubtless these can be realised only if individual natures are not opposed to them. But these are simply the indeterminate matter which the social factor fashions and transforms. Their contribution is made up exclusively of very general states, vague and thus malleable predispositions which of themselves could not assume the definite and complex forms which characterise social phenomena, if other agents did not intervene.

What a gulf, for example, between the feelings that man experiences when confronted with forces superior to his own and the institution of religion with its beliefs and practices, so multifarious and complicated, and its material and moral organisation! What an abyss between the psychical conditions of sympathy which two people of the same blood feel for each other,[18] and that hotchpotch of legal and moral rules which determine the structure of the family, personal relationships, and the relationship of things to persons, etc.! We have seen that even when society is reduced to an unorganised crowd, the collective sentiments which arise within it can not only be totally unlike, but even opposed to, the average sentiments of the individuals in it. How much greater still must be the gap when the pressure exerted upon the individual comes from a normal society, where, to the influence exerted by his contemporaries, is added that of previous generations and of tradition! A purely psychological explanation of social facts cannot therefore fail to miss completely all that is specific, i.e. social, about them.

What has blinkered the vision of many sociologists to the insufficiency of this method is the fact that, taking the effect for the cause, they have very often highlighted as causal conditions for social phenomena certain psychical states, relatively well defined and specific, but which in reality are the consequence of the phenomena. Thus it has been held that a certain religiosity is innate in man, as is a certain minimum of sexual jealousy, filial piety or fatherly affection, etc., and it is in these that explanations have been sought for religion, marriage and the family. But history shows that these inclinations, far from being inherent in human nature, are either completely absent under certain social condi-

tions or vary so much from one society to another that the residue left after eliminating all these differences, and which alone can be considered of psychological origin, is reduced to something vague and schematic, infinitely removed from the facts which have to be explained. Thus these sentiments result from the collective organisation and are far from being at the basis of it. It has not even been proved at all that the tendency to sociability was originally a congenital instinct of the human race. It is much more natural to see in it a product of social life which has slowly become organised in us, because it is an observable fact that animals are sociable or otherwise, depending on whether their environmental conditions force them to live in common or cause them to shun such a life. And even then we must add that a considerable gap remains between these well determined tendencies and social reality.

Furthermore, there is a means of isolating almost entirely the psychological factor, so as to be able to measure precisely the scope of its influence: this is by seeking to determine how race affects social evolution. Ethnic characteristics are of an organic and psychical order. Social life must therefore vary as they vary, if psychological phenomena have on society the causal effectiveness attributed to them. Now we know of no social phenomenon which is unquestionably dependent on race, although we certainly cannot ascribe to this proposition the value of a law. But we can at least assert that it is a constant fact in our practical experience. Yet the most diverse forms of organisation are to be found in societies of the same race, while striking similarities are to be observed among societies of different races. The city state existed among the Phoenicians, as it did among the Romans and the Greeks; we also find it emerging among the Kabyles. The patriarchal family was almost as strongly developed among the Jews as among the Hindus, but it is not to be found among the Slavs, who are nevertheless of Aryan race. By contrast, the family type to be found among the Slavs exists also among the Arabs. The maternal family and the clan are observed everywhere. The precise nature of judicial proofs and nuptial ceremonies is no different among peoples most unlike from the ethnic viewpoint. If this is so, it is because the psychical element is too general to predetermine the course of social phenomena. Since it does not imply one social form rather than another, it cannot explain any such forms. It is true that there are a certain number of facts which it is customary

to ascribe to the influence of race. Thus this, in particular, is how we explain why the development of literature and the arts was so rapid and intense in Athens, so slow and mediocre in Rome. But this interpretation of the facts, despite being the classic one, has never been systematically demonstrated. It seems to draw almost all its authority from tradition alone. We have not even reflected upon whether a sociological explanation of the same phenomena was not possible, yet we are convinced that this might be successfully attempted. In short, when we hastily attribute to aesthetic and inherited faculties the artistic nature of Athenian civilisation, we are almost proceeding as did men in the Middle Ages, when fire was explained by phlogiston and the effects of opium by its soporific powers.

Finally, if social evolution really had its origin in the psychological make-up of man, one fails to see how this could have come about. For then we would have to admit that its driving force is some internal motivation within human nature. But what might such a motivation be? Would it be that kind of instinct of which Comte speaks, which impels man to realise increasingly his own nature? But this is to reply to one question by another, explaining progress by an innate tendency to progress, a truly metaphysical entity whose existence, moreover, has in no way been demonstrated. For the animal species, even those of the highest order, are not moved in any way by a need to progress, and even among human societies there are many which are content to remain stationary indefinitely. Might it be, as Spencer seems to believe, that there is a need for greater happiness, which forms of civilisation of every increasing complexity might be destined to realise more and more completely? It would then be necessary to establish that happiness grows with civilisation, and we have explained elsewhere all the difficulties to which such a hypothesis gives rise. [19] Moreover, there is something else: even if one or other of these postulates were conceded, historical development would not thereby become more intelligible; for the explanation which might emerge from it would be purely teleological. We have shown earlier that social facts, like all natural phenomena, are not explained when we have demonstrated that they serve a purpose. After proving conclusively that a succession of social organisations in history which have become increasingly more knowledgeable have resulted in the greater satisfaction of one or other of our fun-

damental desires, we would not thereby have made the source of these organisations more comprehensible. The fact that they were useful does not reveal to us what brought them into existence. We might even explain how we came to conceive them, by drawing up a blueprint of them beforehand, so as to envisage the services we might expect them to render – and this is already a difficult problem. But our aspirations, which would thereby become the purpose of such organisations, would have no power to conjure them up out of nothing. In short, if we admit that they are the necessary means to attain the object we have in mind, the question remains in its entirety: How, that is to say, from what, and in what manner, have these means been constituted?

Hence we arrive at the following rule: *The determining cause of a social fact must be sought among antecedent social facts and not among the states of the individual consciousness.* Moreover, we can easily conceive that all that has been stated above applies to the determination of the function as well as the cause of a social fact. Its function can only be social, which means that it consists in the production of socially useful effects. Undoubtedly it can and indeed does happen that it has repercussions which also serve the individual. But this happy result is not the immediate rationale for its existence. Thus we can complement the preceding proposition by stating: *The function of a social fact must always be sought in the relationship that it bears to some social end.*

It is because sociologists have often failed to acknowledge this rule and have considered sociological phenomena from too psychological a viewpoint that their theories appear to many minds too vague, too ethereal and too remote from the distinctive nature of the things which sociologists believe they are explaining. The historian, in particular, who has a close contact with social reality cannot fail to feel strongly how these too general interpretations are incapable of being linked to the facts. In part, this has undoubtedly produced the mistrust that history has often manifested towards sociology. Assuredly this does not mean that the study of psychological facts is not indispensable to the sociologist. If collective life does not derive from individual life, the two are none the less closely related. If the latter cannot explain the former, it can at least render its explanation easier. Firstly, as we have shown, it is undeniably true that social facts are produced by an elaboration *sui generis* of psychological facts. But in addition

this action is itself not dissimilar to that which occurs in each individual consciousness and which progressively transforms the primary elements (sensations, reflexes, instincts) of which the consciousness was originally made up. Not unreasonably has the claim been made that the ego is itself a society, just as is the organism, although in a different way. For a long time psychologists have demonstrated the absolute importance of the factor of *association* in the explanation of mental activity. Thus a psychological education, even more than a biological one, constitutes a necessary preparation for the sociologist. But it can only be of service to him if, once he has acquired it, he frees himself from it, going beyond it by adding a specifically sociological education. He must give up making psychology in some way the focal point of his operations, the point of departure to which he must always return after his adventurous incursions into the social world. He must establish himself at the very heart of social facts in order to observe and confront them totally, without any mediating factor, while calling upon the science of the individual only for a general preparation and, if needs be, for useful suggestions.[20]

## III

Since the facts of social morphology are of the same nature as physiological phenomena, they must be explained according to the rule we have just enunciated. However, the whole of the preceding discussion shows that in collective life and, consequently, in sociological explanations, they play a preponderant role.

If the determining condition for social phenomena consists, as we have demonstrated, in the very fact of association, the phenomena must vary with the forms of that association, i.e. according to how the constituent elements in a society are grouped. Furthermore, since the distinct entity formed by the union of elements of all kinds which enter into the composition of a society constitutes its inner environment, in the same way as the totality of anatomical elements, together with the manner in which they are arranged in space, constitutes the inner environment of organisms, we may state: *The primary origin of social processes of any importance must be sought in the constitution of the inner social environment.*

We may be even more precise. In fact, the elements which make up this environment are of two kinds: things and persons. Apart from the material objects incorporated in the society, among things must be included the products of previous social activity – the law and the customs that have been established, and literary and artistic monuments, etc. But it is plain that neither material nor non-material objects produce the impulsion that determines social transformations, because they both lack motivating power. Undoubtedly there is need to take them into account in the explanations which we attempt. To some extent they exert an influence upon social evolution whose rapidity and direction vary according to their nature. But they possess no elements essential to set that evolution in motion. They are the matter to which the vital forces of society are applied, but they do not themselves release any vital forces. Thus the specifically human environment remains as the active factor.

The principal effort of the sociologist must therefore be directed towards discovering the different properties of that environment capable of exerting some influence upon the course of social phenomena. Up to now we have found two sets of characteristics which satisfy that condition admirably. These are: firstly, the number of social units or, as we have also termed it, the 'volume' of the society; and secondly, the degree of concentration of the mass of people, or what we have called the 'dynamic density'. The latter must be understood not only as the purely physical concentration of the aggregate population, which can have no effect if individuals – or rather groups of individuals – remain isolated by moral gaps, but the moral concentration of which physical concentration is only the auxiliary element, and almost invariably the consequence. Dynamic density can be defined, if the volume remains constant, as a function of the number of individuals who are effectively engaged not only in commercial but also moral relationships with each other, i.e. who not only exchange services or compete with one another, but live their life together in common. For, since purely economic relationships leave men separated from each other, these relationships can be very active without people necessarily participating in the same collective existence. Business ties which span the boundaries which separate peoples do not make those boundaries non-existent. The common life can be affected only by the number of people who effectively

co-operate in it. This is why what best expresses the dynamic density of a people is the degree to which the social segments coalesce. For if each partial aggregate forms an entity, a distinct individuality separated from the others by a barrier, it is because in general the activity of its members remains localised within it. If, on the other hand, these partial entities are entirely fused together, or tend to do so, within the total society, it is because the ambit of social life to this extent has been enlarged.

As for the physical density – if this is understood as not only the number of inhabitants per unit of area, but also the development of the means of communication and transmission – this is *normally* in proportion to the dynamic density and, *in general,* can serve to measure it. For if the different elements in the population tend to draw more closely together, it is inevitable that they will establish channels to allow this to occur. Furthermore, relationships can be set up between remote points of the social mass only if distance does not represent an obstacle, which means, in fact, that it must be eliminated. However, there are exceptions,[21] and one would expose oneself to serious error if the moral concentration of a community were always judged according to the degree of physical concentration that it represented. Road, railways, etc. can serve commercial exchanges better than they can serve the fusion of populations, of which they can give only a very imperfect indication. This is the case in England, where the physical density is greater than in France but where the coalescence of social segments is much less advanced, as is shown by the persistence of parochialism and regional life.

We have shown elsewhere how every increase in the volume and dynamic density of societies, by making social life more intense and widening the horizons of thought and action of each individual, profoundly modifies the basic conditions of collective life. Thus we need not refer again to the application we have already made of this principle. It suffices to add that the principle was useful to us in dealing not only with the still very general question which was the object of that study, but many other more specialised problems, and that we have therefore been able to verify its accuracy already by a fair number of experiments. However, we are far from believing that we have uncovered all the special features of the social environment which can play some part in the explanation of social facts. All we can say is that these are the sole

features we have identified and that we have not been led to seek out others.

But the kind of preponderance we ascribe to the social environment, and more especially to the human environment, does not imply that this should be seen as a kind of ultimate, absolute fact beyond which there is no need to explore further. On the contrary, it is plain that its state at any moment in history itself depends on social causes, some of which are inherent in society itself, while others depend on the interaction occurring between that society and its neighbours. Moreover, science knows no first causes, in the absolute sense of the term. For science a fact is primary simply when it is general enough to explain a great number of other facts. Now the social environment is certainly a factor of this kind, for the changes which arise within it, whatever the causes, have repercussions on every part of the social organism and cannot fail to affect all its functions to some degree.

What has just been said about the general social environment can be repeated for the particular environments of the special groups which society includes. For example, depending on whether the family is large or small, or more or less turned in upon itself, domestic life will differ considerably. Likewise, if professional corporations reconstitute themselves so as to spread over a whole area, instead of remaining enclosed within the confines of a city, as they formerly were, their effect will be very different from what it was previously. More generally, professional life will differ widely according to whether the environment peculiar to each occupation is strongly developed or whether its bonds are loose, as is the case today. However, the effect of these special environments cannot have the same importance as the general environment, for they are subject to the latter's influence. Thus we must always return to the general environment. It is the pressure that it exerts upon these partial groups which causes their constitution to vary.

This conception of the social environment as the determining factor in collective evolution is of the greatest importance. For if it is discarded, sociology is powerless to establish any causal relationship.

Indeed, if this order of causes is set aside, there are no concomitant conditions on which social phenomena can depend. For if the external social environment – that which is formed by

neighbouring societies – is capable of exercising some influence, it is only upon the functions of attack and defence; moreover, it can only make its influence felt through the mediation of the internal social environment. The principal causes of historical development would not therefore be found among the *circumfusa* (external influences). They would all be found in the past. They would themselves form part of that development, constituting simply more remote phases of it. The contemporary events of social life would not derive from the present state of society, but from prior events and historical precedents, and sociological explanations would consist exclusively in linking the present to the past.

It is true that this may seem sufficient. Is it not commonly said that the purpose of history is precisely to link up events in their sequence? But it is impossible to conceive how the state which civilisation has attained at any given time could be the determining cause of the state which follows. The stages through which humanity successively passes do not engender each other. We can well understand how the progress realised in a given era in the fields of law, economics and politics, etc., makes fresh progress possible, but how does the one predetermine the other? The progress realised is a point of departure which allows us to proceed further, but what stimulates us to further progress? We would have to concede that there was a certain inner tendency which impels humanity constantly to go beyond the results already achieved, either to realise itself more fully or to increase its happiness, and the purpose of sociology would be to rediscover the order in which this tendency has developed. But without alluding afresh to the difficulties which such a hypothesis implies, in any case a law to express this development could not be in any sense causal. A relationship of causality can in fact only be established between two given facts. But this tendency, presumed to be the cause of development, is not something that is given. It is only postulated as a mental construct according to the effects attributed to it. It is a kind of motivating faculty which we imagine as underlying the movement which occurs, in order to account for it. But the efficient cause of a movement can only be another movement, not a potentiality of this kind. Thus all that we can arrive at experimentally is in point of fact a series of changes between which there exists no causal link. The antecedent state does not produce the subsequent one, but the relationship be-

tween them is exclusively chronological. In these conditions any scientific prediction is thus impossible. We can certainly say how things have succeeded each other up the present, but not in what order they will follow subsequently, because the cause on which they supposedly depend is not scientifically determined, nor can it be so determined. It is true that normally it is accepted that evolution will proceed in the same direction as in the past, but this is a mere supposition. We have no assurance that the facts as they have hitherto manifested themselves are a sufficiently complete expression of this tendency. Thus we are unable to forecast the goal towards which they are moving in the light of the stages through which they have already successively passed. There is no reason to suppose that the direction this tendency follows even traces out a straight line.

This is why the number of causal relationships established by sociologists is so limited. Apart from a few exceptions, among whom Montesquieu is the most illustrious example, the former philosophy of history concentrated solely on discovering the general direction in which humanity was proceeding, without seeking to link the phases of that evolution to any concomitant condition. Despite the great services Comte has rendered to social philosophy, the terms in which he poses the sociological problem do not differ from those of his predecessors. Thus his celebrated law of the three stages has not the slightest causal relationship about it. Even if it were true, it is, and can only be, empirical. It is a summary review of the past history of the human race. It is purely arbitrary for Comte to consider the third stage to be the definitive stage of humanity. Who can say whether another will not arise in the future? Similarly, the law which dominates the sociology of Spencer appears to be no different in nature. Even if it were true that we at present seek our happiness in an industrial civilisation, there is no assurance that, at a later era, we shall not seek it elsewhere. The generality and persistence of this method is due to the fact that very often the social environment has been perceived as a means whereby progress has been realised, and not the cause which determines it.

Furthermore, it is also in relationship to this same environment that must be measured the utilitarian value, or as we have stated it, the function of social phenomena. Among the changes caused by the environment, those are useful which are in harmony with the

existing state of society, since the environment is the essential condition for collective existence. Again, from this viewpoint the conception we have just expounded is, we believe, fundamental, for it alone allows an explanation of how the useful character of social phenomena can vary without depending on arbitrary factors. If historical evolution is envisaged as being moved by a kind of *vis a tergo* (vital urge) which impels men forward, since a dynamic tendency can have only a single goal, there can exist only one reference point from which to calculate the utility or harmfulness of social phenomena. It follows that there exists, and can only exist, a single type of social organisation which fits humanity perfectly, and the different societies of history are only successive approximations to that single model. It is unnecessary to show how such a simplistic view is today irreconcilable with the acknowledged variety and complexity of social forms. If on the other hand the suitability or unsuitability of institutions can only be established in relation to a given environment, since these environments are diverse, a diversity of reference points thus exists, and consequently a diversity of types which, whilst each being qualitatively distinct, are all equally grounded in the nature of the social environment.

The question just dealt with is therefore closely connected to the constitution of social types. If there are social species, it is because collective life depends above all on concomitant conditions which present a certain diversity. If, on the contrary, the main causes of social events were all in the past, every people would be no more than the extension of the one preceding it, and different societies would lose their individuality, becoming no more than various moments in time of one and the same development. On the other hand, since the constitution of the social environment results from the mode in which the social aggregates come together – and the two phrases are in the end synonymous – we have now the proof that there are no characteristics more essential than those we have assigned as the basis for sociological classification.

Finally, we should now realise better than before how unjust it would be to rely on the terms 'external conditions' and 'environment' to serve as an indictment of our method, and seek the sources of life outside what is already alive. On the contrary, the considerations just mentioned lead us back to the idea that the causes of social phenomena are internal to the society. It is much

rather the theory which seeks to derive society from the individual that could be justly reproached with seeking to deduce the internal from the external (since it explains the social being by something other than itself) and the greater from the lesser (since it undertakes to deduce the whole from the part). Our own preceding principles in no way fail to acknowledge the spontaneous character of every living creature: thus, if they are applied to biology and psychology, it will have to be admitted that individual life as well develops wholly within the individual.

## IV

From the set of rules which has just been established, there arises a certain conception of society and collective life.

Two opposing theories divide men on this question.

For some, such as Hobbes and Rousseau, there is a break in continuity between the individual and society. Man is therefore obdurate to the common life and can only resign himself to it if forced to do so. Social ends are not simply the meeting point for individual ends; they are more likely to run counter to then. Thus, to induce the individual to pursue social ends, constraint must be exercised upon him, and it in the institution and organisation of this constraint that lies the supreme task of society. Yet because the individual is regarded as the sole and unique reality of the human kingdom, this organisation, which is designed to constrain and contain him, can only be conceived of as artificial. The organisation is not grounded in nature, since it is intended to inflict violence upon him by preventing him from producing anti-social consequences. It is an artifact, a machine wholly constructed by the hands of men and which, like all products of this kind, is only what it is because men have willed it so; an act of volition created it, another one can transform it. Neither Hobbes nor Rousseau appear to have noticed the complete contradiction that exists in admitting that the individual is himself the creator of a machine whose essential role is to exercise domination and constraint over him. Alternatively, it may have seemed to them that, in order to get rid of this contradiction, it was sufficient to conceal it from the eyes of its victims by the skilful device of the social contract.

It is from the opposing idea that the theoreticians of natural law

and the economists, and more recently Spencer, [22] have drawn their inspiration. For them social life is essentially spontaneous and society is a natural thing. But, if they bestow this characteristic upon it, it is not because they acknowledge it has any specific nature, but because they find a basis for it in the nature of the individual. No more than the two thinkers already mentioned do they see in it a system of things which exists in itself, by virtue of causes peculiar to itself. But while Hobbes and Rousseau only conceived it as a conventional arrangement, with no link at all in reality, which, so to speak, is suspended in air, they in turn state its foundations to be the fundamental instincts of the human heart. Man is naturally inclined to political, domestic and religious life, and to commercial exchanges, etc., and it is from these natural inclinations that social organisation is derived. Consequently, wherever it is normal, there is no need to impose it by force. Whenever it resorts to constraint it is because it is not what it ought to be, or because the circumstances are abnormal. In principle, if individual forces are left to develop untrammelled they will organise themselves socially.

Neither of these doctrines is one we share.

Doubtless we make constraint the characteristic trait of every social fact. Yet this constraint does not arise from some sort of artful machination destined to conceal from men the snares into which they have stumbled. It is simply due to the fact that the individual finds himself in the presence of a force which dominates him and to which he must bow. But this force is a natural one. It is not derived from some conventional arrangement which the human will has contrived, adding it on to what is real; it springs from the heart of reality itself; it is the necessary product of given causes. Thus to induce the individual to submit to it absolutely of his own free will, there is no need to resort to deception. It is sufficient to make him aware of his natural state of dependence and inferiority. Through religion he represents this state to himself by the senses or symbolically; through science he arrives at an adequate and precise notion of it. Because the superiority that society has over him is not merely physical, but intellectual and moral, it need fear no critical examination, provided this is fairly undertaken. Reflection which causes man to understand how much richer or more complex and permanent the social being is than the individual being, can only reveal to him reasons to make

comprehensible the subordination which is required of him and for the feelings of attachment and respect which habit has implanted within him.[23]

Thus only singularly superficial criticism could lay us open to the reproach that our conception of social constraint propagates anew the theories of Hobbes and Machiavelli. But if, contrary to these philosophers, we say that social life is natural, it is not because we find its origin in the nature of the individual; it is because it derives directly from the collective being which is, of itself, a nature *sui generis*; it is because it arises from that special process of elaboration which individual consciousnesses undergo through their association with each other and whence evolves a new form of existence.[24] If therefore we recognise with some authorities that social life presents itself to the individual under the form of constraint, we admit with others that it is a spontaneous product of reality. What logically joins these two elements, in appearance contradictory, is that the reality from which social life emanates goes beyond the individual. Thus these words, 'constraint' and 'spontaneity', have not in our terminology the respective meanings that Hobbes gives to the former and Spencer to the second.

To summarise: to most of the attempts that have been made to explain social facts rationally, the possible objection was either that they did away with any idea of social discipline, or that they only succeeded in maintaining it with the assistance of deceptive subterfuges. The rules we have set out would, on the other hand, allow a sociology to be constructed which would see in the spirit of discipline the essential condition for all common life, while at the same time founding it on reason and truth.

**Notes**

1. Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive,* IV, p. 262.
2. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,* vol. II, part V, ch. II, p. 247.
3. *Division du travail social,* II, chs 3 and 4.
4. We would not wish to raise questions of general philosophy which would be inappropriate here. However, we note that, if more closely studied, this reciprocity of cause and effect could provide a means of reconciling scientific mechanism with the teleology implied by the existence and, above all, the persistence of life.

5. *Division du travail social,* II, ch. 2, and especially pp.105ff.
6. Ibid., pp. 52–3.
7. Ibid., p. 301ff.
8. Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive,* IV, pp. 333–4.
9. Ibid., IV, p. 345.
10. Ibid., IV, p. 346.
11. Ibid., IV, p. 334.
12. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology,*, vol. I, part I, ch. 2.
13. Ibid., vol. I, part I, ch. XXVII, p. 456. [Durkheim paraphrases. The exact quotation reads: 'Setting out with social units as thus conditioned physically, emotionally and intellectually, and as thus possessed of certain early-acquired ideas and correlative feelings, the science of sociology has to give an account of all the phenomena that result from their combined actions.']
14. Ibid., p. 456.
15. Ibid., p. 15.
16. 'Society exists for the benefit of its members; not its members for the benefit of society ... the claims of the body politic are nothing in themselves, and become something only in so far as they embody the claims of its component individuals' (vol.I, pt II, ch. II, pp. 479–80).
17. In this sense and for these reasons we can and must speak of a collective consciousness distinct from individual consciousnesses. To justify this distinction there is no need to hypostatise the collective consciousness; it is something special and must be designated by a special term, simply because the states which constitute it differ specifically from those which make up individual consciousnesses. This specificity arises because they are not formed from the same elements. Individual consciousnesses result from the nature of the organic and psychical being taken in isolation, collective consciousnesses from a plurality of beings of this kind. The results cannot therefore fail to be different, since the component parts differ to this extent. Our definition of the social fact, moreover, did no more than highlight, in a different way, this demarcation line.
18. Inasmuch as it may exist before all animal life. Cf. on this point, A. Espinas, *Des sociétés animales,* (Paris, 1877) p. 474.
19. *Division du travail social,* II, ch. I.
20. Psychical phenomena can only have social consequences when they are so closely linked to social phenomena that the actions of both are necessarily intermingled. This is the case for certain socio-psychical phenomena. Thus a public official is a social force, but at the same time he is an individual. The result is that he can employ the social force he commands in a way determined by his individual nature and thereby exert an influence on the constitution of society. This is what occurs with statesmen and, more generally, with men of genius. The latter, although they do not fulfil a social role, draw from the collective sentiments of which they are the object an authority which is itself a social force, one which they can to a certain extent place at the service of their personal ideas. But it can be seen that such cases

are due to individual chance and consequently cannot affect the characteristics which constitute the social species, which alone is the object of science. The limitation on the principle enunciated above is therefore not of great importance to the sociologist.

21. In our book, *La Division du travail social*, we were wrong to emphasise unduly physical density as being the exact expression of dynamic density. However, the substitution of the former for the latter is absolutely justified for everything relating to the economic effects of dynamic density, for instance the division of labour as a purely economic fact.
22. The position of Comte on this subject is one of a pretty ambiguous eclecticism.
23. This is why all constraint is not normal. Only that constraint which corresponds to some social superiority, intellectual or moral, merits that designation. But that which one individual exercises over another because he is stronger or richer, above all if this wealth does not express his social worth, is abnormal and can only be maintained by violence.
24. Our theory is even more opposed to Hobbes than that of natural law. Indeed, for the supporters of this latter doctrine, collective life is only natural in so far as it can be deduced from the nature of the individual. Now only the most general forms of social organisation can at a pinch be derived from that origin. As for the details of social organisation, these are too far removed from the extreme generality of psychical properties to be capable of being linked to them. They therefore appear to the disciples of this school just as artificial as to their adversaries. For us, on the contrary, everything is natural, even the strangest arrangements, for everything is founded on the nature of society.

# Chapter VI

# Rules for the Demonstration of Sociological Proof

We have only one way of demonstrating that one phenomenon is the cause of another. This is to compare the cases where they are both simultaneously present or absent, so as to discover whether the variations they display in these different combinations of circumstances provide evidence that one depends upon the other. When the phenomena can be artificially produced at will by the observer, the method is that of experimentation proper. When, on the other hand, the production of facts is something beyond our power to command, and we can only bring them together as they have been spontaneously produced, the method used is one of indirect experimentation, or the comparative method.

We have seen that sociological explanation consists exclusively in establishing relationships of causality, that a phenomenon must be joined to its cause, or, on the contrary, a cause to its useful effects. Moreover, since social phenomena clearly rule out any control by the experimenter, the comparative method is the sole one suitable for sociology. It is true that Comte did not deem it to be adequate. He found it necessary to supplement it by what he termed the historical method, but the reason for this lies in his special conception of sociological laws. According to him, these should mainly express, not the definite relationships of causality, but the direction taken by human evolution generally. They cannot therefore be discovered with the aid of comparisons: for it to be possible to compare the different forms that a social phenomenon takes with different peoples, it must have been isolated from the time series to which it belongs. But if we begin by fragmenting human development in this way, we are faced with the impossible task of rediscovering the sequence. To arrive at it,

it is more appropriate to proceed by broad syntheses rather than by analysis. It is necessary to juxtapose both sets of phenomena and join, in the same act of intuition, so to speak, the successive states of humanity so as to perceive 'the continuous increase which occurs in every tendency, whether physical, intellectual, moral or political'.[1] This is the justification for what Comte calls the historical method, but which is consequently robbed of all purpose once the basic conception of Comtean sociology has been rejected.

It is true that John Stuart Mill declares that experimentation, even if indirect, is inapplicable to sociology. But what already suffices to divest his argument of most of its authority is that he applies it equally to biological phenomena and even to the most complex physical and chemical data.[2] But today we no longer need to demonstrate that chemistry and biology can only be experimental sciences. Thus there is no reason why his criticisms should be better founded in the case of sociology, for social phenonmena are only distinguishable from the other phenomena by virtue of their greater complexity. The difference can indeed imply that the use of experimental reasoning in sociology offers more difficulty than in the other sciences, but one cannot see why it should be radically impossible.

Moreover, Mill's whole theory rests upon a postulate which is doubtless linked to the fundamental principles of his logic, but which is in contradiction with all the findings of science. He admits in fact that the same consequence does not always result from the same antecedent, but can be due now to one cause, now to another. This conception of the causal link, by removing from it all determining power, renders it almost inaccessible to scientific analysis, for it introduces such complications into the tangle of causes and effects that the mind is irredeemably confused. If an effect can derive from different causes, in order to know what determines it in a set of given circumstances, the experiment would have to take place in conditions of isolation which are unrealisable in practice, particularly in sociology.

But this alleged axiom of the plurality of causes is a negation of the principle of causality. Doubtless if one believes with Mill that cause and effect are absolutely heterogeneous and that there is between them no logical connexion, there is nothing contradictory in admitting that an effect can follow sometimes from one cause, sometimes from another. If the relationship which joins C to A is

purely chronological, it does not exclude another relationship of the same kind which, for example, would join C to B. But if, on the other hand, the causal link is at all intelligible, it could not then be to such an extent indeterminate. If it consists of a relationship which results from the nature of things, the same effect can only sustain this relationship with one single cause, for it can express only one single nature. Moreover, it is only the philosophers who have ever called into question the intelligibility of the causal relationship. For the scientist it is not problematic; it is assumed by the very method of science. How can one otherwise explain both the role of deduction, so important in experimental reasoning, and the basic principle of the proportionality between cause and effect? As for the cases that are cited in which it is claimed to observe a plurality of causes, in order for them to be proved it would have first to be established either that this plurality is not merely apparent, or that the outward unity of the effect did not conceal a real plurality. How many times has it happened that science has reduced to unity causes whose diversity, at first sight, appeared irreducible! John Stuart Mill gives an example of it when he recalls that, according to modern theories, the production of heat by friction, percussion or chemical action, etc., derives from one single, identical cause. Conversely, when he considers the question of effect, the scientist often distinguishes between what the layman confuses. In common parlance the word 'fever' designates the same, single pathological entity. But for science there is a host of fevers, each specifically different, and the plurality of causes matches the plurality of effects. If, among all these different kinds of diseases there is, however, something all have in common, it is because these causes likewise possess certain characteristics in common.

It is even more important utterly to reject this principle in sociology, because a number of sociologists are still under its influence, even though they raise no objection to the comparative method. Thus it is commonly stated that crime can equally be produced by the most diverse causes, and that this holds true for suicide, punishment, etc. If we practise in this spirit the experimental method, we shall collect together a considerable number of facts to no avail, because we shall never be able to obtain precise laws or clear-cut relationships of causality. We shall only be able to assign vaguely some ill-defined effect to a confused and

amorphous group of antecedents. If therefore we wish to use the comparative method scientifically, i.e., in conformity with the principle of causality as it arises in science itself, we shall have to take as the basis of the comparisons established the following proposition: *To the same effect there always corresponds the same cause.* Thus, to revert to the examples cited above, if suicide depends on more than one cause it is because in reality there are several kinds of suicide. It is the same for crime. For punishment, on the other hand, if we have believed it also explicable by different causes, this is because we have not perceived the common element to be found in all its antecedents, by virtue of which they produce their common effect.[3]

## II

However, if the various procedures of the comparative method are applicable to sociology, they do not all possess equal powers of proof.

The so-called method of 'residues', in so far as it constitutes a form of experimental reasoning at all, is of no special utility in the study of social phenomena. Apart from the fact that it can only be useful in the fairly advanced sciences, since it assumes that a considerable number of laws are already known, social phenomena are far too complex to be able, in any given case, to eliminate the effect of all causes save one.

For the same reason the method of agreement and the method of difference are scarcely usable. They assume in fact that the cases compared either agree or differ only in one single point. Undoubtedly no science exists which has ever been able to set up experiments in which the strictly unique characteristic of an agreement or a difference could ever be irrefutably established. We can never be sure that we have not omitted to consider some antecedent which agrees with or differs from the consequent effect, at the same time and in the same manner as the sole known antecedent. However, the total elimination of every adventitious element is an ideal which can never really be achieved. Yet in fact the physical and chemical sciences, and even the biological sciences, approximate closely enough to it for the proof to be regarded in a great number of cases as adequate in practice. But it is not the

same in sociology because of the too great complexity of the phenomena, and the impossibility of carrying out any artificial experiments. As an inventory could not be drawn up which would even come close to exhausting all the facts which coexist within a single society, or which have succeeded each other in the course of its history, we can never be assured, even very approximately, that two peoples match each other or differ from each other in every respect save one. The chances of one phenomenon eluding our attention are very much greater than those of not neglecting a single one of them. Consequently, such a method of proof can only yield conjectures which, viewed separately, are almost entirely devoid of any scientific character.

But the case of the method of concomitant variations is completely different. Indeed, for it to be used as proof it is not necessary for all the variations different from those we are comparing to have been rigorously excluded. The mere parallelism in values through which the two phenomena pass, provided that it has been established in an adequate number of sufficiently varied cases, is proof that a relationship exists between them. This method owes its validity to the fact that it arrives at the causal relationship, not externally as in the preceding methods, but from the inside, so to speak. It does not simply highlight for us two facts which accompany or exclude each other externally,[4] so that there is no direct proof that they are joined by some inner bond. On the contrary, the method shows us the facts connecting with each other in a continuous fashion, at least as regards their quantitative aspects. Now this connexion alone suffices to demonstrate that they are not foreign to each other. The manner in which a phenomenon develops expresses its nature. For two developments to correspond there must also exist a correspondence between the natures that they reveal. Constant concomitance is therefore by itself a law, regardless of the state of the phenomena left out of the comparison. Thus to invalidate the method it is not sufficient to show that it is inoperative in a few particular applications of the methods of agreement or of difference; this would be to attribute to this kind of proof an authority which it cannot have in sociology. When two phenomena vary regularly together, this relationship must be maintained even when, in certain cases, one of these phenomena appears without the other. For it can happen that either the cause has been prevented from producing its effect by

the influence of some opposing cause, or that it is present, but in a form different from that in which it has previously been observed. Doubtless we need to review the facts, as is said, and to examine them afresh, but we need not abandon immediately the results of a proof which has been regularly demonstrated.

It is true that the laws established through this procedure do not always present themselves at the outset in the form of causal relationships. Concomitance can occur, not because one of the phenomena is the cause of the other, but because they are both effects of the same cause, or indeed because there exists between them a third phenomenon, interposed but unnoticed, which is the effect of the first phenomenon and the cause of the second. The results to which this method leads therefore need to be interpreted. But what experimental method allows one to obtain in mechanical fashion a relationship of causality without the facts which it establishes requiring further mental elaboration? The sole essential is for this elaboration to be methodically carried out. The procedure is as follows. First we shall discover, with the help of deduction, how one of the two terms was capable of producing the other; then we shall attempt to verify the result of this induction with the aid of experiments, i.e. by making fresh comparisons. If the deduction proves possible and the verification is successful, we can therefore regard the proof as having been demonstrated. If, on the other hand, no direct link between these facts is perceived, particularly if the hypothesis that such a link exists contradicts laws already proved, we must set about finding a third phenomenon on which the two others equally depend or which may have served as an intermediary between the two. For example, it can be established absolutely certainly that the tendency to suicide varies according to education. But it is impossible to understand how education can lead to suicide; such an explanation contradicts the laws of psychology. Education, particularly if confined to elementary knowledge, reaches only the most superficial areas of our consciousness, whereas, on the contrary, the instinct of self-preservation is one of our basic tendencies. It could not therefore be appreciably affected by a phenomenon so remote and with such a feeble influence. Thus we are moved to ask whether both facts might not be the consequence of one single state. This common cause is the weakening of religious traditionalism, which reinforces at the same time the desire for knowledge and the

tendency to suicide.

But another reason exists which makes the method of concomitant variations the supreme instrument for sociological research. Even when the circumstances are most favourable for them, the other methods cannot be employed usefully save when the number of facts to be compared is very large. If it is not possible to find two societies which resemble or differ from each other only in one single respect, at least it can be established that two facts very frequently go together or mutually exclude each other. But for this statement to have scientific value it must be validated a very great number of times; we would almost have to be assured that all the facts had been reviewed. But not only is such an exhaustive inventory impossible, but also the facts accumulated in this way can never be established with sufficient exactness, precisely because they are too numerous. Not only do we run the risk of omitting some which are essential and which contradict those already known, but we are also not sure that we know these latter, which are known, sufficiently well. Indeed, what has often discredited the reasoning of sociologists is that, because they have preferred to use the methods of agreement or difference – particularly the former – they have been more intent on accumulating documents than on criticising and selecting from them. Thus they perpetually place the same reliance on the confused and cursory observations of travellers as on the more precise texts of history. Upon seeing such demonstrations of proof we cannot help reflecting that one single fact would suffice to invalidate them, and also that the facts themselves upon which the proofs have been established do not always inspire confidence.

The method of concomitant variations does not force us to make these incomplete enumerations or superficial observations. For it to yield results a few facts suffice. As soon as we have proved that in a certain number of cases two phenomena vary with each other, we may be certain that we are confronted with a law. Since they do not require to be numerous, the documents can be selected, and what is more, studied closely by the sociologist who makes use of them. Therefore he can, and consequently must, take as the chief material for his inductions societies whose beliefs, traditions, customs and law have been embodied in written and authentic records. Undoubtedly he will not disdain the information supplied by the ethnographer. (No facts can be disdained by the scientist.)

But he will assign them to their appropriate place. Instead of making these data the nub of his researches, he will generally use them only to supplement those which he gleans from history, or at the very least he will try to confirm them by the latter. Thus he will not only be more discerning in limiting the scope of his comparisons, but he will conduct them more critically, for by the very fact that he will attach himself to a restricted order of phenomena he will be able to check them more carefully. Undoubtedly he has not to do the work of the historians over again, but he cannot either receive passively and unquestioningly the information which he uses.

It would be wrong to think that sociology is visibly in a state of inferiority as compared with the other sciences merely because it can hardly use more than one experimental process. This drawback is in fact compensated by the wealth of variations which are spontaneously available for the comparisons made by the sociologist, riches without example in any other domain of nature. The changes which take place in an organism in the course of its existence are not very numerous and are very limited; those which can be brought about artificially without destroying its life are themselves confined within narrow bounds. It is true that more important ones have occurred in the course of zoological evolution, but these have left few and only obscure vestiges behind, and it is even more difficult to discover the conditions which determined them. Social life, by contrast, is an uninterrupted series of transformations, parallel to other transformations in the conditions of collective existence. We have available not only information regarding those transformations which relate to a recent era, but information regarding a great number of those through which passed peoples now extinct has also come down to us. In spite of its gaps, the history of humanity is clear and complete in a way different from that of the animal species. Moreover, there exists a wealth of social phenomena which occur over the whole society, but which assume various forms according to regions, occupations, religious faiths, etc. Such are, for instance, crime, suicide, birth and marriage, savings, etc. From the diversity of these particular environments there result, for each of these new orders of facts, new series of variations beyond those which historical evolution has produced. If therefore the sociologist cannot use with equal effectiveness all the procedures of experimental research, the sole

method which he must use to the virtual exclusion of all others can be very fruitful in his hands, for he has incomparable resources to which to apply it.

But it can only produce the appropriate results if it is practised with rigour. Nothing is proved when, as happens so often, one is content to demonstrate by a greater or lesser number of examples that in isolated cases the facts have varied according to the hypothesis. From these sporadic and fragmentary correlations no general conclusion can be drawn. To illustrate an idea is not to prove it. What must be done is not to compare isolated variations, but series of variations, systematically constituted, whose terms are correlated with each other in as continuous a gradation as possible and which moreover cover an adequate range. For the variations of a phenomenon only allow a law to be induced if they express clearly the way in which the phenomenon develops in any given circumstances. For this to happen there must exist between the variations the same succession as exists between the various stages in a similar natural evolution. Moreover, the evolution which the variations represent must be sufficiently prolonged in length for the trend to be unquestionably apparent.

## III

The manner in which such series must be formed will differ according to the different cases. The series can include facts taken either from a single, unique society (or from several societies of the same species), or from several distinct social species.

The first process can, at a pinch, be sufficient when we are dealing with facts of a very general nature about which we have statistical data which are fairly extensive and varied. For instance, by comparing the curve which expresses a suicide trend over a sufficiently extended period of time, with the variations which the same phenomenon exhibits according to provinces, classes, rural or urban environments, sex, age, civil status, etc., we can succeed in establishing real laws without enlarging the scope of our research beyond a single country. Nevertheless, it is always preferable to confirm the results by observations made of other peoples of the same species. Furthermore, we cannot content ourselves with such limited comparisons except when studying one

of those social tendencies which are widely prevalent throughout the whole of society, although varying from one place to another. When, on the other hand, we are dealing with an institution, a legal or moral rule, or an organised custom which is the same and functions in the same manner over an entire country and which only changes over time, we cannot limit ourselves to the study of a single people. If we did so we would only have as material proof a mere pair of parallel curves, namely, the one which expresses the historical development of the phenomenon under consideration and that of its conjectured cause, but only in this single, unique society. Undoubtedly this mere parallelism, if it is constant, is already an important fact, but of itself would not constitute proof.

By taking into account several peoples of the same species, a more extensive field of comparison already becomes available. Firstly, we can confront the history of one people with that of the others and see whether, when each one is taken separately, the same phenomenon evolves over time as a function of the same conditions. Then comparisons can be set up between these various developments. For example, we can determine the form assumed by the particular fact in different societies at the moment when it reaches its highest point of development. However, as the societies are each distinctive entities although belonging to the same type, that form will not be the same everywhere; according to each case, its degree of definition will vary. Thus we shall have a new series of variations to compare with those forms which the presumed condition presents at the same moment in each of these societies. In this way, after we have followed the evolution of the patriarchal family through the history of Rome, Athens and Sparta, these cities can be classified according to the maximum degree of development which this family type attains in each. We can then see whether, in relation to the state of the social environment on which the type apparently depended in the first phase of the investigation, they can still be ranked in the same way.

But this method can hardly be sufficient by itself. It is in fact applicable only to phenomena which have arisen during the existence of the peoples under comparison. Yet a society does not create its organisation by itself alone; it receives it in part ready-made from preceding societies. What is therefore transmitted to it is not any product of its historical development and

consequently cannot be explained unless we go outside the confines of the species to which it belongs. Otherwise only the additions which are made to its original base and which transform it can be dealt with. But the higher the social scale, the less the importance of the characteristics acquired by each people as compared with those which have been handed down. This is moreover the condition of all progress. Thus the new elements we have introduced into domestic law, the law of property, and morality, from the beginning of our history, are relatively few and of small importance compared to those which the distant past has bequeathed to us. The innovations which occur in this way cannot therefore be understood unless we have first studied those more fundamental phenomena which are their roots, but which cannot be studied without the help of much broader comparisons. To be in a position to explain the present state of the family, marriage and property, etc., we must know the origins of each and what are the primal elements from which these institutions are composed. On these points the comparative history of the great European societies could not shed much light. We must go even further back.

Consequently, to account for a social institution belonging to a species already determined, we shall compare the different forms which it assumes not only among peoples of that species, but in all previous species. If, for instance, we are dealing with domestic organisations, we will first constitute the most rudimentary type that has ever existed, so as to follow step by step the way in which it has progressively grown more complex. This method, which might be termed 'genetic', would yield at one stroke the analysis and the synthesis of the phenomenon. For, on the one hand, it would show us in dissociated state its component elements by the mere fact that it would reveal to us how one was successively added to the other. At the same time, thanks to the wide field of comparison, we would be much better placed to determine the conditions upon which their formation and association depend. *Consequently one cannot explain a social fact of any complexity save on condition that one follows its entire development throughout all social species.* Comparative sociology is not a special branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts.

In the course of these extended comparisons, an error is often made which falsifies the results. Sometimes, in order to judge the

direction in which social events are proceeding, one may simply have compared what occurs at the decline of each species with what occurs at the beginning of the succeeding one. Using this procedure, it was believed, for example, that one could state that the weakening of religious beliefs and of all traditionalism could only ever be a transitory phenomenon in the life of peoples, because it manifests itself only during the final phase of their existence and ceases as soon as a new stage of evolution takes over. In employing such a method one risks taking for the steady and necessary march of progress what is the effect of a completely different cause. In fact, the condition in which a young society finds itself is not simply the prolongation of that at which the societies it replaces had arrived at the end of their existence. It arises partly from that very state of youthfulness which stops the products of the experiences of the previous peoples from all becoming immediately assimilable and utilisable. Likewise, the child receives from his parents faculties and predispositions which come into play only much later in life. It is therefore possible – to continue the same example – that the return to traditionalism observed at the beginning of every people's history is due to the special conditions in which every young society is placed, and not to the fact that the waning of that phenomenon can never be anything but transitory. The comparison can therefore only serve as proof if we can eliminate this disturbing factor of the age of a society. To do this, *it will be sufficient to consider the societies which one is comparing at the same period of their development.* Thus in order to ascertain the direction in which a social phenomenon is evolving, one will compare what it is during the 'youth' of every species with what the phenomenon becomes in the 'youth' of the succeeding species. According to whether, from one of these stages to the next, it displays more, less or as much intensity, one will be able to state whether it is progressing, regressing or remaining static.

**Notes**

1. *Cours de philosophie positive,* IV, p. 328.
2. Cf. J.S. Mill, *System of Logic,* vol. II, book VI, ch. VII, p. 476.
3. *Division du travail social,* p. 87.
4. In the case of the method of difference, the absence of the cause excludes the presence of the effect.

# Conclusion

To summarise, the characteristics of the sociological method are as follows:

Firstly, it is independent of all philosophy. Since sociology sprang from the great philosophical doctrines, it has been in the habit of relying on some system with which it has therefore identified itself. Thus it has been successively positivist, evolutionalist and spiritualist, when it should have contented itself with being just sociology. We should even hesitate to term it naturalistic, unless by this we mean only that it regards social facts as explicable naturally. In that case the epithet is somewhat useless, since it merely means that the sociologist is engaged in scientific work and is not a mystic. But we reject the word if it is assigned a doctrinal meaning relating to the essence of social things – if, for instance, it is meant that they are reducible to the other cosmic forces. Sociology has no need to take sides between the grand hypotheses which divide the metaphysicians. Nor has it to affirm free will rather than determinism. All that it asks to be granted it, is that the principle of causality should be applicable to social phenomena. Moreover, this principle is posed by it not as a rational necessity, but only as an empirical postulate, the product of a legitimate induction. Since the law of causality has been verified in the other domains of nature and has progressively extended its authority from the physical and chemical world to the biological world, and from the latter to the psychological world, one may justifiably grant that it is likewise true of the social world. Today it is possible to add that the research undertaken on the basis of this postulate tends to confirm this. But the question of knowing whether the nature of the causal link excludes all contingency is not thereby resolved.

Moreover, philosophy itself has every interest in seeing this emancipation of sociology. For, so long as the sociologist has not shed sufficiently the mantle of the philosopher, he will consider social matters only from their most general angle, that in which they most resemble the other things in the universe. Now if sociology, conceived of in this fashion, may serve to illustrate a philosophy with curious facts, it cannot enrich it with new vistas, since it would not point to anything new in the subject matter of philosophy. But in reality, if the basic facts of other fields of knowledge are to be found in the social domain, it is under special forms which cause us to understand its nature better because they are its highest expression. But, in order to perceive them in this light, we must abandon generalities and enter into the detailed examination of facts. Thus sociology, as it becomes more specialised, will provide additional original matter for philosophical reflection. Already what has been set out has been able to give some insight into how essential notions such as those of species, organ, function, health and sickness, cause and finality are displayed in an entirely novel light. Moreover, is it not sociology which is destined to highlight in all its aspects an idea which might well be at the basis not only of a psychology, but of an entire philosophy, the idea of association?

Face to face with practical doctrines, our method allows and commands the same independence. Sociology thus understood will be neither individualist, communist or socialist, in the sense commonly attributed to those words. On principle, it will ignore these theories, which it could not acknowledge to have any scientific value, since they tend not directly to express social facts but to reform them. At least, if sociology is interested in them, it is in so far as it sees in them social facts which may help it to understand social reality by clarifying the needs which operate in society. Nevertheless, this is not to say that sociology should profess no interest in practical questions. On the contrary, it has been seen that our constant preoccupation has been to guide it towards some practical outcome. It encounters these problems necessarily at the end of its investigations. But from the very fact that the problems do not manifest themselves until that moment and that, consequently, they arise out of facts and not from passions, it may be predicted that they will present themselves to the sociologist in completely different terms than to the masses.

Moreover, the solutions, although incomplete, that sociology can provide to them will not chime exactly with those which attract the various interest groups. But the role of sociology, from this viewpoint, must consist precisely in liberating us from all parties. This will be done not so much by opposing one doctrine to other doctrines, but by causing those minds confronted with these questions to develop a special attitude, one that science alone can give through direct contact with things. Indeed, it alone can teach us to treat, with respect but without idolatry, historical institutions of whatever kind, by causing us to be aware, at one and the same time, of what is necessary and provisional about them, their strength of resistance and their infinite variability.

In the second place, our method is objective. It is wholly dominated by the idea that social facts are things and must be treated as such. Doubtless this principle is also found, in slightly different form, at the basis of the doctrines of Comte and Spencer. But these great thinkers formulated it theoretically rather than put it into practice. But for it not to remain a dead letter, it was not sufficient merely to publish it abroad; it had to be made the basis of an entire discipline, an idea that would take hold of the scholar at the very moment when he is entering upon the object of his research and which would accompany him step by step in all his operations. It was to establish that discipline that we have devoted our work. We have shown how the sociologist had to lay aside the preconceived notions that he held about the facts in order to confront the facts themselves; how he had to penetrate to them through their most objective characteristics; how he had to address himself to them in order to find a means of classifying them as healthy or pathological; how, finally, he had to be inspired by the same principle in seeking out explanations as in proving these explanations. For once we become aware that we are in the presence of things, we no longer dream of explaining them by calculations of utility or by reasoning of any kind. We understand too well the gulf that lies between such causes and such effects. A thing is a force which can only be engendered by another force. Thus, to account for social facts, we investigate the forces capable of producing them. Not only are the explanations different, but they are proved differently, or rather, it is only then that the need to prove them is felt. If sociological phenomena were mere objectivised systems of ideas, to explain them would consist of

thinking them through again in their logical order and this explanation would be a proof in itself. At the most, there might be a need to confirm it by a few examples. On the contrary, only methodical experimentation can force things to yield up their secrets.

But if we consider social facts as things, it is as *social things*. The third feature which is characteristic of our method is that it is exclusively sociological. It has often seemed that these phenomena, because of their extreme complexity, were either intractable to science or could only become part of it if reduced to their elementary conditions, either psychical or organic, that is to say, divested of their proper nature. On the contrary, we have undertaken to establish that it is possible to deal with them scientifically without taking away any of their specific characteristics. We have even refused to relate the immateriality *sui generis* which characterises them to the immateriality of psychological phenomena, which is moreover already very complex. We are thus all the more prohibited from assimilating them, as does the Italian school, into the general properties of organised matter.[1] We have demonstrated that a social fact cannot be explained except by another social fact and at the same time have shown how this sort of explanation is possible by indicating what within the inner social environment is the principal motivating force of collective evolution. Thus sociology is not the appendage of any other science; it is itself a distinct and autonomous science. The sense of the specific nature of social reality is even so essential to the sociologist that only a purely sociological culture can prepare him for the understanding of social facts.

We regard this progress of sociological culture as the most important of all the steps that remain to be taken in sociology. Undoubtedly when a science is in the process of being created one is indeed forced, in order to construct it, to refer to the sole models which exist, namely those of sciences already constructed. There is in them a treasure-house of ready-made experiences which it would be foolish not to exploit. However, a science cannot be considered definitively constituted until it has succeeded in establishing its own independent status. For it lacks any justification for existing unless its subject matter is an order of facts which other sciences do not study, since it is impossible for the same notions to fit identically things of a different nature.

Such appear to us to be the rules of sociological method.

This set of rules will perhaps appear needlessly complicated if compared to the procedures currently in use. All this apparatus of precautions can seem very laborious for a science which up to now has demanded hardly more than a general and philosophical culture of its devotees. It is indeed certain that the application of such a method cannot have the effect of stimulating further common curiosity about sociological matters. When, as a preliminary condition for initiation into sociology, people are asked to discard concepts which they are in the habit of applying to a particular order of things, to rethink these things with renewed effort, we cannot expect to enlist a numerous clientèle. But this is not the goal towards which we strive. We believe, on the contrary, that the time has come for sociology to renounce worldly successes, so to speak, and take on the esoteric character which befits all science. Thus it will gain in dignity and authority what it will perhaps lose in popularity. For, so long as it remains embroiled in partisan struggles and is content to elaborate, with indeed more logic than commonly employed, common ideas, and in consequence presumes no special competence, it has no right to speak authoritatively enough to quell passions and dispel prejudices. Assuredly the time is still remote when it will be able effectively to play this role. Yet, from this very moment onwards, we must work to place it in a position to fulfil this part.

**Note**

1. It is therefore improper to characterise our method as materialist.