IN 1895 Emile Durkheim wrote a book called *The Rules of Sociological Method* which was intended as a working manual for persons interested in the systematic study of society. One of the most important themes of Durkheim's work was that sociologists should formulate a new set of criteria for distinguishing between "normal" and "pathological" elements in the life of a society. Behavior which looks abnormal to the psychiatrist or the judge, he suggested, does not always look abnormal when viewed through the special lens of the sociologist; and thus students of the new science should be careful to understand that even the most aberrant forms of individual behavior may still be considered normal from this broader point of view. To illustrate his argument, Durkheim made the surprising observation that crime was really a natural kind of social activity, "an integral part of all healthy societies." [1]

Durkheim's interest in this subject had been expressed several years before when *The Division of Labor in Society* was first

[1] Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method,* trans. S. A. Solovay and J. H. Mueller (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958), p. 67.

published.[2] In that important book, he had suggested that crime (and by extension other forms of deviation) may actually perform a needed service to society by drawing people together in a common posture of anger and indignation. The deviant individual violates rules of conduct which the rest of the community holds in high respect; and when these people come together to express their outrage over the offense and to bear witness against the offender, they develop a tighter bond of solidarity than existed earlier. The excitement generated by the crime, in other words, quickens the tempo of interaction in the group and creates a climate in which the private sentiments of many separate persons are fused together into a common sense of morality.

> Crime brings together upright consciences and concentrates them. We have only to notice what happens, particularly in a small town, when some moral scandal has just been committed. They stop each other on the street, they visit each other, they seek to come together to talk of the event and to wax indignant in common. From all the similar impressions which are exchanged, for all the temper that gets itself expressed, there emerges a unique temper . . . which is everybody's without being anybody's in particular. That is the public temper.[3]

The deviant act, then, creates a sense of mutuality among the people of a community by supplying a focus for group feeling. Like a war, a flood, or some other emergency, deviance makes people more alert to the interests they share in common and draws attention to those values which constitute the "collective conscience" of the community. Unless the rhythm of group life is punctuated by occasional moments of deviant behavior, presumably, social organization would be impossible.[4]

This brief argument has been regarded a classic of sociological thinking ever since it was first presented, even though it has not inspired much in the way of empirical work. The purpose of the present chapter is to consider Durkheim's suggestion in terms more congenial to modern social theory and to see if these insights can be translated into useful research hypotheses. The pages to follow may range far afield from the starting point recommended by Durkheim, but they are addressed to the question he originally posed: does it make any sense to assert that deviant forms of behavior are a natural and even beneficial part of social life?

[2] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. George Simpson (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960).

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

[4] A similar point was later made by George Herbert Mead in his very important paper "The Psychology of Punitive Justice," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXIII (March 1918), pp. 577–602.

I

One of the earliest problems the sociologist encounters in his search for a meaningful approach to deviant behavior is that the subject itself does not seem to have any natural boundaries. Like people in any field, sociologists find it convenient to assume that the deviant person is somehow "different" from those of his fellows who manage to conform, but years of research into the problem have not yielded any important evidence as to what, if anything, this difference might be. Investigators have studied the character of the deviant's background, the content of his dreams, the shape of his skull, the substance of his thoughts—yet none of this information has enabled us to draw a clear line between the kind of person who commits deviant acts and the kind of person who does not. Nor can we gain a better perspective on the matter by shifting our attention away from the individual deviant and looking instead at the behavior he enacts. Definitions of deviance vary widely as we range over the various classes found in a single society or across the various cultures into which mankind is divided, and it soon becomes apparent that there are no objective properties which all deviant acts can be said to share in common —even within the confines of a given group. Behavior which qualifies one man for prison may qualify another for sainthood,

since the quality of the act itself depends so much on the circumstances under which it was performed and the temper of the audience which witnessed it.

This being the case, many sociologists employ a far simpler tactic in their approach to the problem—namely, to let each social group in question provide its own definitions of deviant behavior. In this study, as in others dealing with the same general subject,[5] the term "deviance" refers to conduct which the people of a group consider so dangerous or embarrassing or irritating that they bring special sanctions to bear against the persons who exhibit it. Deviance is not a property *inherent in* any particular kind of behavior; it is a property *conferred upon* that behavior by the people who come into direct or indirect contact with it. The only way an observer can tell whether or not a given style of behavior is deviant, then, is to learn something about the standards of the audience which responds to it.

This definition may seem a little awkward in practice, but it has the advantage of bringing a neglected issue into proper focus. When the people of a community decide that it is time to "do something" about the conduct of one of their number, they are involved in a highly intricate process. After all, even the worst miscreant in society conforms most of the time, if only in the sense that he uses the correct silver at dinner, stops obediently at traffic lights, or in a hundred other ways respects the ordinary conventions of his group. And if his fellows elect to bring sanctions against him for the occasions when he does misbehave, they are responding to a few deviant details scattered among a vast array of entirely acceptable conduct. The person who appears in a criminal court and is stamped a "thief" may have spent no more than a passing moment engaged in that activity, and the same can be said for many of the people who pass in review before some agency of control and return from the experience

[5] See particularly the works of Edwin M. Lemert, Howard S. Becker, and John I. Kitsuse.

with a deviant label of one sort or another. When the community nominates someone to the deviant class, then, it is sifting a few important details out of the stream of behavior he has emitted and is in effect declaring that these details reflect the kind of person he "really" is. In law as well as in public opinion, the fact that someone has committed a felony or has been known to use narcotics can become the major identifying badge of his person: the very expression "he is a thief" or "he is an addict" seems to provide at once a description of his position in society and a profile of his character.

The manner in which a community sifts these telling details out of a person's overall performance, then, is an important part of its social control apparatus. And it is important to notice that the people of a community take a number of factors into account when they pass judgment on one another which are not immediately related to the deviant act itself: whether or not a person will be considered deviant, for instance, has something to do with his social class, his past record as an offender, the amount of remorse he manages to convey, and many similar concerns which take hold in the shifting mood of the community. Perhaps this is not so apparent in cases of serious crime or desperate illness, where the offending act looms so darkly that it obscures most of the other details of the person's life; but in the day-by-day sifting processes which take place throughout society this feature is always present. Some men who drink heavily are called alcoholics and others are not, some men who behave oddly are committed to hospitals and others are not, some men with no visible means of support are charged with vagrancy and others are not—and the difference between those who earn a deviant title in society and those who go their own way in peace is largely determined by the way in which the community filters out and codes the many details of behavior which come to its attention.

Once the problem is phrased in this manner we can ask: how does a community decide which of these behavioral details are important enough to merit special attention? And why, having

made this decision, does it build institutions like prisons and asylums to detain the persons who perform them? The conventional answer to that question, of course, is that a society creates the machinery of control in order to protect itself against the "harmful" effects of deviation, in much the same way that an organism mobilizes its resources to combat an invasion of germs. Yet this simple view of the matter is apt to pose many more problems than it actually settles. As both Emile Durkheim and George Herbert Mead pointed out long ago, it is by no means evident that all acts considered deviant in society are in fact (or even in principle) harmful to group life. It is undoubtedly true that no culture would last long if its members engaged in murder or arson among themselves on any large scale, but there is no real evidence that many other of the activities considered deviant throughout the world (certain dietary prohibitions are a prominent example) have any relationship to the group's survival. In our own day, for instance, we might well ask why prostitution or marihuana smoking or homosexuality are thought to endanger the health of the social order. Perhaps these activities *are* dangerous, but to accept this conclusion without a thoughtful review of the situation is apt to blind us to the important fact that people in every corner of the world manage to survive handsomely while engaged in practices which their neighbors regard as extremely abhorrent. In the absence of any surer footing, then, it is quite reasonable for sociologists to return to the most innocent and yet the most basic question which can be asked about deviation: why does a community assign one form of behavior rather than another to the deviant class?

The following paragraphs will suggest one possible answer to that question.

II

Human actors are sorted into various kinds of collectivity, ranging from relatively small units such as the nuclear family to relatively large ones such as a nation or culture. One of the most stubborn difficulties in the study of deviation is that the problem is defined differently at each one of these levels: behavior that is considered unseemly within the context of a single family may be entirely acceptable to the community in general, while behavior that attracts severe censure from the members of the community may go altogether unnoticed elsewhere in the culture. People in society, then, must learn to deal separately with deviance at each one of these levels and to distinguish among them in his own daily activity. A man may disinherit his son for conduct that violates old family traditions or ostracize a neighbor for conduct that violates some local custom, but he is not expected to employ either of these standards when he serves as a juror in a court of law. In each of the three situations he is required to use a different set of criteria to decide whether or not the behavior in question exceeds tolerable limits.

In the next few pages we shall be talking about deviant behavior in social units called "communities," but the use of this term does not mean that the argument applies only at that level of organization. In theory, at least, the argument being made here should fit all kinds of human collectivity—families as well as whole cultures, small groups as well as nations—and the term "community" is only being used in this context because it seems particularly convenient.[6]

The people of a community spend most of their lives in close contact with one another, sharing a common sphere of experience which makes them feel that they belong to a special "kind" and live in a special "place." In the formal language of sociology, this means that communities are boundary maintaining: each has a specific territory in the world as a whole, not only in the sense that it occupies a defined region of geographical space but also in the sense that it takes over a particular niche in what might be

[6] In fact, the first statement of the general notion presented here was concerned with the study of small groups. See Robert A. Dentler and Kai T. Erikson, "The Functions of Deviance in Groups," *Social Problems,* VII (Fall 1959), pp. 98–107.

called cultural space and develops its own "ethos" or "way" within that compass. Both of these dimensions of group space, the geographical and the cultural, set the community apart as a special place and provide an important point of reference for its members.

When one describes any system as boundary maintaining, one is saying that it controls the fluctuation of its constituent parts so that the whole retains a limited range of activity, a given pattern of constancy and stability, within the larger environment. A human community can be said to maintain boundaries, then, in the sense that its members tend to confine themselves to a particular radius of activity and to regard any conduct which drifts outside that radius as somehow inappropriate or immoral. Thus the group retains a kind of cultural integrity, a voluntary restriction on its own potential for expansion, beyond that which is strictly required for accommodation to the environment. Human behavior can vary over an enormous range, but each community draws a symbolic set of parentheses around a certain segment of that range and limits its own activities within that narrower zone. These parentheses, so to speak, are the community's boundaries.

Now people who live together in communities cannot relate to one another in any coherent way or even acquire a sense of their own stature as group members unless they learn something about the boundaries of the territory they occupy in social space, if only because they need to sense what lies beyond the margins of the group before they can appreciate the special quality of the experience which takes place within it. Yet how do people learn about the boundaries of their community? And how do they convey this information to the generations which replace them?

To begin with, the only material found in a society for marking boundaries is the behavior of its members—or rather, the networks of interaction which link these members together in regular social relations. And the interactions which do the most

effective job of locating and publicizing the group's outer edges would seem to be those which take place between deviant persons on the one side and official agents of the community on the other. The deviant is a person whose activities have moved outside the margins of the group, and when the community calls him to account for that vagrancy it is making a statement about the nature and placement of its boundaries. It is declaring how much variability and diversity can be tolerated within the group before it begins to lose its distinctive shape, its unique identity. Now there may be other moments in the life of the group which perform a similar service: wars, for instance, can publicize a group's boundaries by drawing attention to the line separating the group from an adversary, and certain kinds of religious ritual, dance ceremony, and other traditional pageantry can dramatize the difference between "we" and "they" by portraying a symbolic encounter between the two. But on the whole, members of a community inform one another about the placement of their boundaries by participating in the confrontations which occur when persons who venture out to the edges of the group are met by policing agents whose special business it is to guard the cultural integrity of the community. Whether these confrontations take the form of criminal trials, excommunication hearings, courts-martial, or even psychiatric case conferences, they act as boundary-maintaining devices in the sense that they demonstrate to whatever audience is concerned where the line is drawn between behavior that belongs in the special universe of the group and behavior that does not. In general, this kind of information is not easily relayed by the straightforward use of language. Most readers of this paragraph, for instance, have a fairly clear idea of the line separating theft from more legitimate forms of commerce, but few of them have ever seen a published statute describing these differences. More likely than not, our information on the subject has been drawn from publicized instances in which the relevant laws were applied—and for that matter, the law itself is largely a collection of past cases and decisions, a

synthesis of the various confrontations which have occurred in the life of the legal order.

It may be important to note in this connection that confrontations between deviant offenders and the agents of control have always attracted a good deal of public attention. In our own past, the trial and punishment of offenders were staged in the market place and afforded the crowd a chance to participate in a direct, active way. Today, of course, we no longer parade deviants in the town square or expose them to the carnival atmosphere of a Tyburn, but it is interesting that the "reform" which brought about this change in penal practice coincided almost exactly with the development of newspapers as a medium of mass information. Perhaps this is no more than an accident of history, but it is nonetheless true that newspapers (and now radio and television) offer much the same kind of entertainment as public hangings or a Sunday visit to the local gaol. A considerable portion of what we call "news" is devoted to reports about deviant behavior and its consequences, and it is no simple matter to explain why these items should be considered newsworthy or why they should command the extraordinary attention they do. Perhaps they appeal to a number of psychological perversities among the mass audience, as commentators have suggested, but at the same time they constitute one of our main sources of information about the normative outlines of society. In a figurative sense, at least, morality and immorality meet at the public scaffold, and it is during this meeting that the line between them is drawn.

Boundaries are never a fixed property of any community. They are always shifting as the people of the group find new ways to define the outer limits of their universe, new ways to position themselves on the larger cultural map. Sometimes changes occur within the structure of the group which require its members to make a new survey of their territory—a change of leadership, a shift of mood. Sometimes changes occur in the surrounding environment, altering the background against which the

people of the group have measured their own uniqueness. And always, new generations are moving in to take their turn guarding old institutions and need to be informed about the contours of the world they are inheriting. Thus single encounters between the deviant and his community are only fragments of an ongoing social process. Like an article of common law, boundaries remain a meaningful point of reference only so long as they are repeatedly tested by persons on the fringes of the group and repeatedly defended by persons chosen to represent the group's inner morality. Each time the community moves to censure some act of deviation, then, and convenes a formal ceremony to deal with the responsible offender, it sharpens the authority of the violated norm and restates where the boundaries of the group are located.

For these reasons, deviant behavior is not a simple kind of leakage which occurs when the machinery of society is in poor working order, but may be, in controlled quantities, an important condition for preserving the stability of social life. Deviant forms of behavior, by marking the outer edges of group life, give the inner structure its special character and thus supply the framework within which the people of the group develop an orderly sense of their own cultural identity. Perhaps this is what Aldous Huxley had in mind when he wrote:

> Now tidiness is undeniably good—but a good of which it is easily possible to have too much and at too high a price. . . . The good life can only be lived in a society in which tidiness is preached and practised, but not too fanatically, and where efficiency is always haloed, as it were, by a tolerated margin of mess.[7]

This raises a delicate theoretical issue. If we grant that human groups often derive benefit from deviant behavior, can we then assume that they are organized in such a way as to promote this resource? Can we assume, in other words, that forces operate in the social structure to recruit offenders and to com-

[7] Aldous Huxley, *Prisons: The "Carceri" Etchings by Piranesi* (London: The Trianon Press, 1949), p. 13.

mit them to long periods of service in the deviant ranks? This is not a question which can be answered with our present store of empirical data, but one observation can be made which gives the question an interesting perspective—namely, that deviant forms of conduct often seem to derive nourishment from the very agencies devised to inhibit them. Indeed, the agencies built by society for preventing deviance are often so poorly equipped for the task that we might well ask why this is regarded as their "real" function in the first place.

It is by now a thoroughly familiar argument that many of the institutions designed to discourage deviant behavior actually operate in such a way as to perpetuate it. For one thing, prisons, hospitals, and other similar agencies provide aid and shelter to large numbers of deviant persons, sometimes giving them a certain advantage in the competition for social resources. But beyond this, such institutions gather marginal people into tightly segregated groups, give them an opportunity to teach one another the skills and attitudes of a deviant career, and even provoke them into using these skills by reinforcing their sense of alienation from the rest of society.[8] Nor is this observation a modern one:

> The misery suffered in gaols is not half their evil; they are filled with every sort of corruption that poverty and wickedness can generate; with all the shameless and profligate enormities that can be produced by the impudence of ignominy, the rage of want, and the malignity of dispair. In a prison the check of the public eye is removed; and the power of the law is spent. There are few fears, there are no blushes. The lewd inflame the more modest; the audacious harden the timid. Everyone fortifies himself as he can against his own remaining sensibility; endeavoring to practise on others the arts that are practised on himself; and to gain the applause of his worst associates by imitating their manners.[9]

[8] For a good description of this process in the modern prison, see Gresham Sykes, *The Society of Captives* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958). For discussions of similar problems in two different kinds of mental hospital, see Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962) and Kai T. Erikson, "Patient Role and Social Uncertainty: A Dilemma of the Mentally Ill," *Psychiatry*, XX (August 1957), pp. 263–274.

These lines, written almost two centuries ago, are a harsh indictment of prisons, but many of the conditions they describe continue to be reported in even the most modern studies of prison life. Looking at the matter from a long-range historical perspective, it is fair to conclude that prisons have done a conspicuously poor job of reforming the convicts placed in their custody; but the very consistency of this failure may have a peculiar logic of its own. Perhaps we find it difficult to change the worst of our penal practices because we *expect* the prison to harden the inmate's commitment to deviant forms of behavior and draw him more deeply into the deviant ranks. On the whole, we are a people who do not really expect deviants to change very much as they are processed through the control agencies we provide for them, and we are often reluctant to devote much of the community's resources to the job of rehabilitation. In this sense, the prison which graduates long rows of accomplished criminals (or, for that matter, the state asylum which stores its most severe cases away in some back ward) may do serious violence to the aims of its founders, but it does very little violence to the expectations of the population it serves.

These expectations, moreover, are found in every corner of society and constitute an important part of the climate in which we deal with deviant forms of behavior.

To begin with, the community's decision to bring deviant sanctions against one of its members is not a simple act of censure. It is an intricate rite of transition, at once moving the individual out of his ordinary place in society and transferring him into a special deviant position.[10] The ceremonies which mark

[9] Written by "a celebrated" but not otherwise identified author (perhaps Henry Fielding) and quoted in John Howard, *The State of the Prisons*, London, 1777 (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1929), p. 10.

[10] The classic description of this process as it applies to the medical patient is found in Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951).

this change of status, generally, have a number of related phases. They supply a formal stage on which the deviant and his community can confront one another (as in the criminal trial); they make an announcement about the nature of his deviancy (a verdict or diagnosis, for example); and they place him in a particular role which is thought to neutralize the harmful effects of his misconduct (like the role of prisoner or patient). These commitment ceremonies tend to be occasions of wide public interest and ordinarily take place in a highly dramatic setting.[11] Perhaps the most obvious example of a commitment ceremony is the criminal trial, with its elaborate formality and exaggerated ritual, but more modest equivalents can be found wherever procedures are set up to judge whether or not someone is legitimately deviant.

Now an important feature of these ceremonies in our own culture is that they are almost irreversible. Most provisional roles conferred by society—those of the student or conscripted soldier, for example—include some kind of terminal ceremony to mark the individual's movement back out of the role once its temporary advantages have been exhausted. But the roles allotted the deviant seldom make allowance for this type of passage. He is ushered into the deviant position by a decisive and often dramatic ceremony, yet is retired from it with scarcely a word of public notice. And as a result, the deviant often returns home with no proper license to resume a normal life in the community. Nothing has happened to cancel out the stigmas imposed upon him by earlier commitment ceremonies; nothing has happened to revoke the verdict or diagnosis pronounced upon him at that time. It should not be surprising, then, that the people of the community are apt to greet the returning deviant with a considerable degree of apprehension and distrust, for in a very real sense they are not at all sure who he is.

[11] See Harold Garfinkel, "Successful Degradation Ceremonies," *American Journal of Sociology*, LXI (January 1956), pp. 420–424.

A circularity is thus set into motion which has all the earmarks of a "self-fulfilling prophesy," to use Merton's fine phrase. On the one hand, it seems quite obvious that the community's apprehensions help reduce whatever chances the deviant might otherwise have had for a successful return home. Yet at the same time, everyday experience seems to show that these suspicions are wholly reasonable, for it is a well-known and highly publicized fact that many if not most ex-convicts return to crime after leaving prison and that large numbers of mental patients require further treatment after an initial hospitalization. The common feeling that deviant persons never really change, then, may derive from a faulty premise; but the feeling is expressed so frequently and with such conviction that it eventually creates the facts which later "prove" it to be correct. If the returning deviant encounters this circularity often enough, it is quite understandable that he, too, may begin to wonder whether he has fully graduated from the deviant role, and he may respond to the uncertainty by resuming some kind of deviant activity. In many respects, this may be the only way for the individual and his community to agree what kind of person he is.

Moreover this prophesy is found in the official policies of even the most responsible agencies of control. Police departments could not operate with any real effectiveness if they did not regard ex-convicts as a ready pool of suspects to be tapped in the event of trouble, and psychiatric clinics could not do a successful job in the community if they were not always alert to the possibility of former patients suffering relapses. Thus the prophesy gains currency at many levels within the social order, not only in the poorly informed attitudes of the community at large, but in the best informed theories of most control agencies as well.

In one form or another this problem has been recognized in the West for many hundreds of years, and this simple fact has a curious implication. For if our culture has supported a steady flow of deviation throughout long periods of historical

change, the rules which apply to any kind of evolutionary thinking would suggest that strong forces must be at work to keep the flow intact—and this because it contributes in some important way to the survival of the culture as a whole. This does not furnish us with sufficient warrant to declare that deviance is "functional" (in any of the many senses of that term), but it should certainly make us wary of the assumption so often made in sociological circles that any well-structured society is somehow designed to prevent deviant behavior from occurring.[12]

It might be then argued that we need new metaphors to carry our thinking about deviance onto a different plane. On the whole, American sociologists have devoted most of their attention to those forces in society which seem to assert a centralizing influence on human behavior, gathering people together into tight clusters called "groups" and bringing them under the jurisdiction of governing principles called "norms" or "standards." The questions which sociologists have traditionally asked of their data, then, are addressed to the uniformities rather than the divergencies of social life: how is it that people learn to think in similar ways, to accept the same group moralities, to move by the same rhythms of behavior, to see life with the same eyes? How is it, in short, that cultures accomplish the incredible alchemy of making unity out of diversity, harmony out of conflict, order out of confusion? Somehow we often act as if the differences between people can be taken for granted, being too natural to require comment, but that the symmetry which human groups manage to achieve must be explained by referring to the molding influence of the social structure.

But variety, too, is a product of the social structure. It is certainly remarkable that members of a culture come to look

[12] Albert K. Cohen, for example, speaking for a dominant strain in sociological thinking, takes the question quite for granted: "It would seem that the control of deviant behavior is, by definition, a culture goal." See "The Study of Social Disorganization and Deviant Behavior" in Merton, et al., *Sociology Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 465.

so much alike; but it is also remarkable that out of all this sameness a people can develop a complex division of labor, move off into diverging career lines, scatter across the surface of the territory they share in common, and create so many differences of temper, ideology, fashion, and mood. Perhaps we can conclude, then, that two separate yet often competing currents are found in any society: those forces which promote a high degree of conformity among the people of the community so that they know what to expect from one another, and those forces which encourage a certain degree of diversity so that people can be deployed across the range of group space to survey its potential, measure its capacity, and, in the case of those we call deviants, patrol its boundaries. In such a scheme, the deviant would appear as a natural product of group differentiation. He is not a bit of debris spun out by faulty social machinery, but a relevant figure in the community's overall division of labor.

III

The foregoing statement has introduced a number of different themes which lend themselves to one or another kind of historical analysis, and the object of the present section will be to draw attention to three of them. Each of these themes will become the underlying motif of a later chapter as we begin to apply the sociological argument to the historical example and see whether it helps explain what happened in seventeenth century New England.

The first and most important theme has to do with the relationship between a community's boundaries and the kinds of deviation experienced. Every human community has its own special set of boundaries, its own unique identity, and so we may presume that every community also has its own characteristic styles of deviant behavior. Societies which place a high premium on ownership of property, for example, are likely to experience a greater volume of theft than those which do not, while socie-

ties which emphasize political orthodoxy are apt to discover and punish more sedition than their less touchy neighbors. This obvious parallel occurs for at least two reasons. In the first place, any community which feels jeopardized by a particular form of behavior will impose more severe sanctions against it and devote more time and energy to the task of rooting it out. At the same time, however, the very fact that a group expresses its concern about a given set of values often seems to draw a deviant response from certain of its members. There are people in any society who appear to "choose" a deviant style exactly *because* it offends an important value of the group—some of them because they have an inner need to challenge this value in a direct test, and some of them, as Merton has pointed out, because they clumsily violate a norm in their very eagerness to abide by it.[13] In either of these events, the deviant and his more conventional counterpart live in much the same world of symbol and meaning, sharing a similar set of interests in the universe around them. The thief and his victim share a common respect for the value of property; the heretic and the inquisitor speak much the same language and are keyed to the same religious mysteries; the traitor and the patriot act in reference to the same political institutions, often use the same methods, and for that matter are sometimes the same person. Nor is this a trivial observation, for these pairs of adversaries are so well attuned to one another that they can and often do reverse roles with minor shifts in the historical climate. Joseph Conrad put the case very well in one of his novels when he described the policeman and the criminal as individuals "making countermoves in the same game": "Products of the same machine," he pointed out, "one classified as useful and the other as noxious, they take the machine for granted in different ways but with a seriousness essentially the same." [14]

[13] Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1949).

[14] Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, undated), pp. 68, 85.

The deviant and the conformist, then, are creatures of the same culture, inventions of the same imagination. And thus it can happen that the most feared and most respected styles of behavior known to a particular age often seem to mirror one another—so accurately, in fact, that observers looking in from another point in time cannot always tell them apart. A twentieth-century American, for example, is supposed to understand that larceny and other forms of commercial activity are wholly different, standing "on opposite sides of the law." A seventeenth-century American, on the other hand, if he lived in New England, was supposed to understand that Congregationalism and Antinomianism were as far apart as God and the Devil. Yet if we were to examine the contrasts of this sort which have been drawn in varying periods of the past or are currently drawn in other cultures than our own, we would find many of them rather obscure. It takes a keen theological eye to see where the Puritans drew the line between orthodoxy and some of the more serious forms of heresy, and it is quite conceivable that any Puritan who found himself transported to the middle of the present century would find it difficult to understand some of the distinctions we make, say, between proper and improper sexual conduct. Or to use a more current example, many Soviet commentators in our own day do not see any real difference between the forms of enterprise which put some Americans at the head of corporations and others in prison, while we, in our turn, cannot easily distinguish among the various shades of opinion which have meant the difference between life and death in the Soviet Union. Thus variations in action and attitude which mean "worlds of difference" at one time in history may seem like so many split hairs when exposed to the hard light of another.

At the height of the witchcraft hysteria in Massachusetts, the sociologist in Cotton Mather began to notice that the witches who terrorized the countryside were really very similar to the honest men who prosecuted them:

'Tis very remarkable to see what an impious and impudent imitation of divine things is apishly affected by the Devil, in several of those matters, whereof the confessions of our witches and the afflictions of our sufferers have informed us. . . . The witches do say, that they form themselves much after the manner of Congregational churches; and that they have a baptism and a supper, and officers among them, abominably resembling those of our Lord. . . . What is their striking down with a fierce look? What is their making of the afflicted rise, with a touch of their hand? What is their transportation thro' the air? What is their travelling in spirit, while their body is cast into a trance? What is their causing of cattle to run mad and perish? What is their entering their names in a book? What is their coming together from all parts, at the sound of a trumpet? What is their appearing sometimes clothed with light or fire upon them? What is their covering of themselves and their instruments with invisibility? But a blasphemous imitation of certain things recorded about our Savior or His Prophets, or the saints of the Kingdom of God.[15]

If deviation and conformity are so alike, it is not surprising that deviant behavior should seem to appear in a community at exactly those points where it is most feared. Men who fear witches soon find themselves surrounded by them; men who become jealous of private property soon encounter eager thieves. And if it is not always easy to know whether fear creates the deviance or deviance the fear, the affinity of the two has been a continuing course of wonder in human affairs. Observers of a later age may look back and understand that the witches and the magistrates were using the same cultural vocabulary and moving to the same cultural rhythms, but on the whole this secret is not known to the people of the time. To them, deviant behavior seems to come out of nowhere, an uninvited, perverse thrust at the very heart of the community. This feeling was caught nicely by one historian writing about deviance in the Bay colony:

[15] Cotton Mather, "Wonders of the Invisible World," in Samuel G. Drake, editor, *The Witchcraft Delusion in New England* (Roxbury, Mass.: W. Elliot Woodward, 1866), I, pp. 201–203.

Here we note a very natural relation between the spirit of persecution and the spirit which obstinately and even wantonly or perversely provoked it. The fathers were anxiously, we say morbidly and timidly, dreading lest their bold venture in the wilderness should be prostrated before it could strike root. . . . *Their troublers came precisely in the form and shape in which they apprehended them.* . . . As will soon appear, there was something extraordinary in the odd variety, the grotesque characteristics, and the specially irritating and exasperating course of that strange succession of men and women, of all sorts of odd opinions and notions, who presented themselves during a period of thirty years, seeming to have in common no other object than to grieve and exasperate the Puritan magistrates.[16]

The magistrates may well have been surprised by the form and shape in which their persistent troublers appeared, but these were only the forms and shapes of Puritan life itself—the reflected image of those values which stood at the core of the Puritan consciousness. Indeed, as we shall later see, it was during these meetings between the magistrates and their wayward countrymen that the forms of American Puritanism moved into focus, developed their own special character, and became the identifying landmarks of the larger community. In the process of defining the nature of deviation, the settlers were also defining the boundaries of their new universe, and this is the issue which shall provide the main focus of Chapter 3.

The second implication of the introductory essay which will be pursued in this study has to do with the *volume* of deviant behavior found in social life. It is one of the arguments of the present study that the amount of deviation a community encounters is apt to remain fairly constant over time. To start at the

[16] George Edward Ellis, "The Puritan Commonwealth: Its Basis, Organization, and Administration: Its Contentions; Its Conflicts with Heretics," in Justin Winsor, editor, *The Memorial History of Boston* (Boston: James Osgood, 1880), I, p. 166. Emphasis added.

beginning, it is a simple logistic fact that the number of deviancies which come to a community's attention are limited by the kinds of equipment it uses to detect and handle them, and to that extent the rate of deviation found in a community is at least in part a function of the size and complexity of its social control apparatus. A community's capacity for handling deviance, let us say, can be roughly estimated by counting its prison cells and hospital beds, its policemen and psychiatrists, its courts and clinics—and while this total cannot tell us anything important about the underlying psychological motives involved, it does say something about the manner in which the community views the problem. Most communities, it would seem, operate with the expectation that a relatively constant number of control agents is necessary to cope with a relatively constant number of offenders. The amount of men, money, and material assigned by society to "do something" about deviant behavior does not vary appreciably over time, and the implicit logic which governs the community's efforts to man a police force or maintain suitable facilities for the mentally ill seems to be that there is a fairly stable quota of trouble which should be anticipated.

In this sense, the agencies of control often seem to define their job as that of keeping deviance *within bounds* rather than that of obliterating it altogether. Many judges, for example, assume that severe punishments are a greater deterrent to crime than moderate ones, and so it is important to note that many of them are apt to impose harder penalties when crime seems to be on the increase and more lenient ones when it does not, almost as if the power of the bench were being used to keep the crime rate from getting out of hand.

Generally speaking, we invoke emergency measures when the volume of deviance threatens to grow beyond some level we have learned to consider "normal," but we do not react with the same alarm when the volume of deviance stays within those limits. As George Bernard Shaw once pointed out, a society completely intent on suppressing crime would punish every offender

with all the severity it could manage—for the present system, with its careful attention to the formula that punishment should vary with the circumstances of the crime, only seems to suggest that society can afford certain kinds of crime more readily than others. From this point of view, every society acts on the assumption that it possesses the machinery for curbing crime—the power to impose inhibiting punishments—yet that power is ordinarily used in such a way as to stabilize rather than eliminate the amount of crime in the social order.

The same tendency toward stabilization can be seen in the field of mental health, where the number of available hospital beds and outpatient hours exercise a strict control over the number of people who are or can be regarded as sick. If the size of a hospital's waiting list grows too long, the only practical strategy is to discharge its present occupants more rapidly; and conversely, if the waiting list diminishes to the point where the hospital confronts a loss of revenue or a shortage of patients for teaching purposes, local practitioners are urged to send more referrals. In moments of severe pressure, perhaps, physicians may sometimes discharge a patient about whom they have private doubts, but the statistics of mental health do not record these reservations and the community is not ordinarily aware of them. When the community tries to assess the size of its deviant population, then, it is usually measuring the capacity of its own social control apparatus and not the inclinations toward deviance found among its members.

The reason for drawing attention to this logistic problem is not simply to point out that the community has poor measuring instruments for surveying the size of its deviant problem, but rather to suggest that the community develops its definition of deviance so that it encompasses a range of behavior roughly equivalent to the available space in its control apparatus—a kind of inverted Parkinson's law. That is, when the community calibrates its control machinery to handle a certain volume of deviant behavior, it tends to adjust its legal and psychiatric def-

initions of the problem in such a way that this volume is in fact realized. After all, every control agent and every control facility is "needed" by society. If the police should somehow learn to contain most of the crimes it now contends with, and if at the same time medical science should discover a cure for most of the mental disorders it now treats, it is still improbable that the existing control machinery would go unused. More likely, the agencies of control would turn their attention to other forms of behavior, even to the point of defining as deviant certain styles of conduct which were not regarded so earlier.

At any given time, then, the "worst" people in the community are considered its criminals, the "sickest" its patients, no matter how serious these conditions may appear according to some universal standard. In that sense, deviance can be defined as behavior which falls on the outer edge of the group's experience, whether the range of that experience is wide or narrow. In his earlier paper on the subject, Durkheim used an instructive example:

> Imagine a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals. Crimes, properly so called, will there be unknown; but faults which appear venial to the layman will create there the same scandal that the ordinary offense does in ordinary consciousness. If, then, this society has the power to judge and punish, it will define these acts as criminal and will treat them as such.[17]

And much the same thing can be said about changes in the community as it moves from one period to another. If a community were able simply to lop off its most marginal people—banishing them to another part of the world, for instance, or executing them by the carload—it is unlikely that the volume of deviation in the community would really be reduced. Either new ranks of offenders would move into the vacuum in place of their departed fellows (as England discovered when it tried a policy of wholesale transportation to the colonies) or the agencies of control would focus on a new target area and develop an interest in the behavior taking place there.

[17] Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, pp. 68–69.

According to this argument, then, we should expect to find that the amount of deviation experienced by a community will remain fairly stable over time, and this is what we will look for in the material presented in Chapter 4.

The third implication of the introductory essay which will command further attention has to do with the way a society handles its deviant members. As has been suggested before, deviant persons can be said to supply needed services to society by marking the outer limits of group experience and providing a point of contrast which gives the norm some scope and dimension. Yet it is important to keep in mind that every society deals with this resource differently: each has its own method for naming people to deviant positions and its own method for deploying them across the range of group space. For the moment we may call these methods "deployment patterns" to indicate that they regulate the flow of deviant persons to and from the boundaries of the group and in this way govern the amount of deviation in the structure at any given time.

It cannot be the purpose of this study to make an inventory of the various deployment patterns known in different parts of the world, but we might note three which seem to reappear frequently in ethnological literature. First, there are societies which appoint special days or occasions as periods of general license, during which members of the group are permitted (if not expected) to violate rules they have observed during the preceding season and will observe again during the coming season. Second, there are societies in which deviance is regarded as a "natural" form of behavior for adolescents and young people generally, although individuals who take advantage of this exemption are expected to change their ways the moment they move

through defined ceremonies into adulthood. Finally, there are societies which have special clubs or orders whose stated business it is to infringe the ordinary rules of the group in some prescribed manner.

Now it might be argued that in each of these cases the resulting behavior is entirely "expected" and therefore the product of normative structuring: after all, the tribesman who curses the gods and eats forbidden food during a festival is only responding to a new set of holiday rules, the youth who joins street riots or profanes a sacred ceremony has a kind of permit from his elders to behave in that fashion, and the "contrary" who obstinately refuses to follow the ordinary conventions of his group is only doing what everyone expects of him anyway. Clearly, the sanctions governing these departures from the norm suggest that we are speaking of "deviance" in a rather special sense. Yet it is one of the implications of this study that deviant behavior in our own culture may be more tightly patterned than we ordinarily think, and while it may seem absurd to argue that people who act deviantly in our courts and clinics are responding to "rules" in much the same sense as a participant in a festival, it is still instructive to note the many parallels between these deployment patterns and the mechanisms at work in our own social order. All of these patterns allow people of the group an intimate experience of the line separating morality from immorality; all of them exercise strict control over the volume of deviance found in the system at any given time—not because they *prevent* it from occurring, to be sure, but because they can schedule its appearance according to some cultural timetable. When a group can halt a general period of license by declaring the end of a festival, or transform rioting youths into responsible adults by the use of a single rite of passage, it is demonstrating a remarkable degree of control. And perhaps we can look for similar mechanisms in other cultures where the "rules" governing deviant behavior are not so apparent.

In any event, if we turn to the New England Puritans with

this thought in mind and ask how they regulated the human traffic moving in and out of provisional deviant roles, we may see the outlines of still another deployment pattern—one which may have left its imprint on our twentieth-century ways of dealing with the problem. This will be the main theme of Chapter 5.

These three different themes, then, will provide the theoretical frame for the chapters to follow. In Chapter 3 we will look at three "crime waves" which took place in the early years of the Bay colony and see how these episodes helped the settlers define the boundaries of their emerging society. Chapter 4 will examine a set of court records surviving from the time to look for evidence of stability in the local crime rate. Chapter 5, then, will turn to the Puritan "deployment pattern" and ask how this pattern influenced both the original settlers and later generations of Americans in their handling of deviant behavior.

But before we apply the sociological argument to the historical case, we should become better acquainted with the Puritans themselves and the settlement they built in the forests of New England.