

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) is widely acknowledged as one of the founders of sociology for his groundbreaking work in social theory, methodology, and substantive areas such as suicide, religion, and labor. In the following selection from his first book, *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim explores the notion of social solidarity, that is, how individuals and society are bound together. Durkheim asserts that modern societies maintain their cohesion through dependencies brought about by the division of labor, not the sameness of responsibilities and tasks found in traditional societies. Law is different in each of these societies as well, as traditional societies governed by mechanical solidarity rely on repressive law, while modern societies with organic solidarity are characterized by restitutive law.

THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN SOCIETY

Emile Durkheim

This work had its origins in the question of the relations of the individual to social solidarity. Why does the individual, while becoming more autonomous, depend more upon society? How can he be at once more individual and more solidary? Certainly, these two movements, contradictory as they appear, develop in parallel fashion. This is the problem we are raising. It appeared to us that what resolves this apparent antinomy is a transformation of social solidarity due to the steadily growing development of the division of labor...

...The division of labor is not of recent origin, but it was only at the end of the eighteenth century that social cognizance was taken of the principle, though, until then, unwitting submission had been rendered to it. To be sure, several thinkers from earliest times saw its importance;¹ but Adam Smith was the first to attempt a theory of it. Moreover, he adopted this phrase that social science later lent to biology.

Nowadays, the phenomenon has developed so generally it is obvious to all. We need have no further illusions about the tendencies of modern industry; it advances steadily towards powerful machines, towards great concentrations of forces and capital, and consequently to the extreme division of labor. Occupations are infinitely separated and specialized, not only inside the factories, but each product is itself a specialty dependent upon others. Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill still hoped that agriculture, at least, would be an exception to the rule, and they saw it as the last resort of small-scale industry. Although one must be careful not to generalize unduly in such matters, nevertheless it is hard to deny today that the principal branches of the agricultural industry are steadily being drawn into the general movement.² Finally, business itself is ingeniously following and reflecting in all its shadings the infinite diversity of industrial enterprises; and, while this evolution is realizing itself with unpremeditated spontaneity, the economists, examining its causes and appreciating its results, far from condemning or opposing it, uphold it as necessary. They see in it the supreme law of human societies and the condition of their progress.

But the division of labor is not peculiar to the economic world; we can observe its growing influence in the most varied fields of society. The political, administrative, and judicial

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, E, 1133a, 16.

² *Journal des Economistes*, November 1884, p. 211.

functions are growing more and more specialized. It is the same with the aesthetic and scientific functions. It is long since philosophy reigned as the science unique; it has been broken into a multitude of special disciplines each of which has its object, method, and thought. "Men working in the sciences have become increasingly more specialized."³...

... The social relations to which the division of labor gives birth have often been considered only in terms of exchange, but this misinterprets what such exchange implies and what results from it. It suggests two beings mutually dependent because they are each incomplete, and translates this mutual dependence outwardly. It is, then, only the superficial expression of an internal and very deep state. Precisely because this state is constant, it calls up a whole mechanism of images which function with a continuity that exchange does not possess. The image of the one who completes us becomes inseparable from ours, not only because it is frequently associated with ours, but particularly because it is the natural complement of it. It thus becomes an integral and permanent part of our conscience, to such a point that we can no longer separate ourselves from it and seek to increase its force. That is why we enjoy the society of the one it represents, since the presence of the object that it expresses, by making us actually perceive it, sets it off more. On the other hand, we will suffer from all circumstances which, like absence or death, may have as effect the barring of its return or the diminishing of its vivacity.

As short as this analysis is, it suffices to show that this mechanism is not identical with that which serves as a basis for sentiments of sympathy whose source is resemblance. Surely there can be no solidarity between others and us unless the image of others unites itself with ours. But when the union results from the resemblance of two images, it consists in an agglutination. The two representations become solidary because, being indistinct, totally or in part, they confound each other, and become no more than one, and they are solidary only in the measure which they confound themselves. On the contrary, in the case of the division of labor, they are outside each other and are linked only because they are distinct. Neither the sentiments nor the social relations which derive from these sentiments are the same in the two cases.

We are thus led to ask if the division of labor would not play the same role in more extensive groups, if, in contemporary societies where it has developed as we know, it would not have as its function the integration of the social body to assure unity. It is quite legitimate to suppose that the facts which we have just observed reproduce themselves here, but with greater amplitude, that great political societies can maintain themselves in equilibrium only thanks to the specialization of tasks, that the division of labor is the source, if not unique, at least principal, of social solidarity. Comte took this point of view. Of all sociologists, to our knowledge, he is the first to have recognized in the division of labor something other than a purely economic phenomenon. He saw in it "the most essential condition of social life," provided that one conceives it "in all its rational extent; that is to say, that one applies it to the totality of all our diverse operations of whatever kind, instead of attributing it, as is ordinarily done, to simple material usages." Considered in this light, he says, "it leads immediately to regarding not only individuals and classes, but also, in many respects, different peoples, as at once participating, following a definite path in a special degree, exactly determined, in a work, immense and communal, whose inevitable gradual development links actual cooperators to their predecessors and even to their successors. It is thus the continuous repartition of different

³ De Candolle, *Histoire des Sciences et des Savants*, 2nd ed., p. 263.

human endeavors which especially constitutes social solidarity and which becomes the elementary cause of the extension and growing complication of the social organism.”⁴

If this hypothesis were proved, the division of labor would play a role much more important than that which we ordinarily attribute to it. It would serve not only to raise societies to luxury, desirable perhaps, but superfluous; it would be a condition of their existence. Through it, or at least particularly through it, their cohesion would be assured; it would determine the essential traits of their constitution. Accordingly, although we may not yet be in position to resolve the question rigorously, we can, however, imply from it now that, if such is really the function of the division of labor, it must have a moral character, for the need of order, harmony, and social solidarity is generally considered moral.

But before seeing whether this common opinion is well founded, we must verify the hypothesis that we have just given forth concerning the role of the division of labor. Let us see if, in effect, in the societies in which we live, it is from this that social solidarity essentially derives.

But how shall we proceed to such verification?

We must not simply look to see if, in these types of society, there exists a social solidarity which comes from the division of labor. That is a self-evident truism, since in such societies the division of labor is highly developed and produces solidarity. Rather we must especially determine in what degree the solidarity that it produces contributes to the general integration of society, for it is only then that we shall know how far necessary it is, whether it is an essential factor of social cohesion, or whether, on the contrary, it is only an accessory and secondary condition. To reply to this question, we must compare this social link to others in order to measure how much credit is due to it in the total effect; and to that end, we must begin by classifying the different types of social solidarity.

But social solidarity is a completely moral phenomenon which, taken by itself, does not lend itself to exact observation nor indeed to measurement. To proceed to this classification and this comparison, we must substitute for this internal fact which escapes us an external index which symbolizes it and study the former in the light of the latter.

This visible symbol is law. In effect, despite its immaterial character, wherever social solidarity exists, it resides not in a state of pure potentiality, but manifests its presence by sensible indices. Where it is strong, it leads men strongly to one another, frequently puts them in contact, multiplies the occasions when they find themselves related. To speak correctly, considering the point our investigation has reached, it is not easy to say whether social solidarity produces these phenomena, or whether it is a result of them, whether men relate themselves because it is a driving force, or whether it is a driving force because they relate themselves. However, it is not, at the moment, necessary to decide this question; it suffices to state that the two orders of fact are linked and vary at the same time and in the same sense. The more solidary the members of a society are, the more they sustain diverse relations, one with another, or with the group taken collectively, for, if their meetings were rare, they would depend upon one another only at rare intervals, and then tenuously. Moreover, the number of these relations is necessarily proportional to that of the juridical rules which determine them. Indeed, social life, especially where it exists durably, tends inevitably to assume a definite form and to organize itself, and law is nothing else than this very organization in so far as it

⁴ Cours de philosophie positive, IV, p. 425.—Analogous ideas are found in Schaeffle, *Bau und Leben des sozialen Koerpers*, II, *passim*, and Clément, *Science Sociale*, I, pp. 235 ff.

has greater stability and precision. The general life of society cannot extend its sway without juridical life extending its sway at the same time and in direct relation. We can thus be certain of finding reflected in law all the essential varieties of social solidarity....

... Shall we go further and say that social solidarity does not completely manifest itself perceptibly, that these manifestations are only partial and imperfect, that behind law and custom there is an internal state whence it derives, and that in order to know it truly we must intuit it without intermediaries?—But we can know causes scientifically only by the effects that they produce, and in order to determine their nature, science chooses from these effects only the most objective and most easily measurable. Science studies heat through the variations in volume which changes in temperature produce in bodies, electricity through its physico-chemical effects, force through movement. Why should social solidarity be an exception?

What remains of it divested of social forms? What gives it its specific characters is the nature of the group whose unity it assures; that is why it varies according to social types. It is not the same in the family and in political societies; we are not attached to our country in the same fashion as the Roman was to his city or the German to his tribe. But since these differences relate themselves to social causes, we can understand them only with reference to the differences that the social effects of solidarity present. If, then, we neglect the latter, all the varieties become indiscernible and we can no longer perceive what is common to all of them, that is, the general tendency to sociability, a tendency which is always and everywhere the same and is special to no particular social type. But this residue is only an abstraction, for sociability in itself is nowhere found. What exists and really lives are the particular forms of solidarity, domestic solidarity, occupational solidarity, national solidarity, yesterday's, today's, etc. Each has its proper nature; consequently, these general remarks, in every case, give only a very incomplete explanation of a phenomenon, since they necessarily omit the concrete and the vital.

The study of solidarity thus grows out of sociology. It is a social fact we can know only through the intermediary of social effects. If so many moralists and psychologists have been able to treat the question without following this procedure, it has been by circumventing the difficulty. They have eliminated from the phenomenon all that is peculiarly social in order to retain only the psychological germ whence it developed. It is surely true that solidarity, while being a social fact of the first order, depends on the individual organism. In order to exist, it must be contained in our physical and psychic constitution. One can thus rigorously limit oneself to studying this aspect. But, in that case, one sees only the most indistinct and least special aspect. It is not even solidarity properly speaking, but rather what makes it possible.

Moreover, this abstract study would not be very fertile in results. For, in its dependence upon a state of simple disposition in our psychic nature, solidarity is much too indefinite to be comprehended easily. It is an intangible phenomenon which does not lend itself to observation. In order to assume a comprehensible form, certain social consequences must translate it overtly. Moreover, even in this indeterminate state, it depends upon social conditions which explain it and from which, consequently, it cannot be detached. That is why it is very rare that some sociological views do not find their way into these analyses of pure psychology. For example, we speak of the influence of the gregarious state on the formation of social sentiment in general⁵; or perhaps indicate in short compass the principal social

⁵ Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, pp. 131 ff.

relations on which sociability quite apparently depends.⁶ Without doubt, these complementary considerations, introduced helter-skelter, with examples and following chance suggestions, will not suffice to elucidate very much of the social nature of solidarity. They show, at least, that the sociological point of view is incumbent even upon psychologists.

Our method has now been fully outlined. Since law reproduces the principal forms of social solidarity, we have only to classify the different types of law to find therefrom the different types of social solidarity which correspond to it. It is now probable that there is a type which symbolizes this special solidarity of which the division of labor is the cause. That found, it will suffice, in order to measure the part of the division of labor, to compare the number of juridical rules which express it with the total volume of law.

For this task, we cannot use the distinctions utilized by the juriconsults. Created for practical purposes, they can be very useful from this point of view, but science cannot content itself with these empirical classifications and approximations. The most accepted is that which divides law into public and private; the first is for the regulation of the relations of the individual to the State, the second, of individuals among themselves. But when we try to get closer to these terms, the line of demarcation which appeared so neat at the beginning fades away. All law is private in the sense that it is always about individuals who are present and acting; but so, too, all law is public, in the sense that it is a social function and that all individuals are, whatever their varying titles, functionaries of society. Marital functions, paternal, etc., are neither delimited nor organized in a manner different from ministerial and legislative functions, and it is not without reason that Roman law entitled tutelage *munus publicum*. What, moreover, is the State? Where does it begin and where does it end? We know how controversial the question is; it is not scientific to make a fundamental classification repose on a notion so obscure and so badly analyzed.

To proceed scientifically, we must find some characteristic which, while being essential to juridical phenomena, varies as they vary. Every precept of law can be defined as a rule of sanctioned conduct. Moreover, it is evident that sanctions change with the gravity attributed to precepts, the place they hold in the public conscience, the role they play in society. It is right, then, to classify juridical rules according to the different sanctions which are attached to them.

They are of two kinds. Some consist essentially in suffering, or at least a loss, inflicted on the agent. They make demands on his fortune, or on his honor, or on his life, or on his liberty, and deprive him of something he enjoys. We call them repressive. They constitute penal law. It is true that those which are attached to rules which are purely moral have the same character, only they are distributed in a diffuse manner, by everybody indiscriminately, whereas those in penal law are applied through the intermediary of a definite organ; they are organized. As for the other type, it does not necessarily imply suffering for the agent, but consists only of the return of things as they were, in the reestablishment of troubled relations to their normal state, whether the incriminated act is restored by force to the type whence it deviated, or is annulled, that is, deprived of all social value. We must then separate juridical rules into two great classes, accordingly as they have organized repressive sanctions or only restitutive sanctions. The first comprise all penal law; the second, civil law, commercial law, procedural law, administrative and constitutional law, after abstraction of the penal rules which may be found there.

Let us now seek for the type of social solidarity to which each of these two types corresponds....

⁶ Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, Part VIII, ch. v.

... there exists a social solidarity which comes from a certain number of states of conscience which are common to all the members of the same society. This is what repressive law materially represents, at least in so far as it is essential. The part that it plays in the general integration of society evidently depends upon the greater or lesser extent of the social life which the common conscience embraces and regulates. The greater the diversity of relations wherein the latter makes its action felt, the more also it creates links which attach the individual to the group; the more, consequently, social cohesion derives completely from this source and bears its mark. But the number of these relations is itself proportional to that of the repressive rules. In determining what fraction of the juridical system penal law represents, we, at the same time, measure the relative importance of this solidarity. It is true that in such a procedure we do not take into account certain elements of the collective conscience which, because of their smaller power or their indeterminateness, remain foreign to repressive law while contributing to the assurance of social harmony. These are the ones protected by punishments which are merely diffuse. But the same is the case with other parts of law. There is not one of them which is not complemented by custom, and as there is no reason for supposing that the relation of law and custom is not the same in these different spheres, this elimination is not made at the risk of having to alter the results of our comparison....

... the relations governed by co-operative law with restitutive sanctions and the solidarity which they express, result from the division of social labor. We have explained, moreover, that, in general, co-operative relations do not convey other sanctions. In fact, it is in the nature of special tasks to escape the action of the collective conscience, for, in order for a thing to be the object of common sentiments, the first condition is that it be common, that is to say, that it be present in all consciences and that all can represent it in one and the same manner. To be sure, in so far as functions have a certain generality, everybody can have some idea of them. But the more specialized they are, the more circumscribed the number of those cognizant of each of them. Consequently, the more marginal they are to the common conscience. The rules which determine them cannot have the superior force, the transcendent authority which, when offended, demands expiation. It is also from opinion that their authority comes, as is the case with penal rules, but from an opinion localized in restricted regions of society.

Moreover, even in the special circles where they apply and where, consequently, they are represented in people, they do not correspond to very active sentiments, nor even very often to any type of emotional state. For, as they fix the manner in which the different functions ought to concur in diverse combinations of circumstances which can arise, the objects to which they relate themselves are not always present to consciences. We do not always have to administer guardianship, trusteeship⁷ or exercise the rights of creditor or buyer, etc., or even exercise them in such and such a condition. But the states of conscience are strong only in so far as they are permanent. The violation of these rules reaches neither the common soul of society in its living parts, nor even, at least not generally, that of special groups, and, consequently, it can determine only a very moderate reaction. All that is necessary is that the functions concur in a regular manner. If this regularity is disrupted, it behooves us to re-establish it. Assuredly, that is not to say that the development of the division of labor cannot be affective of penal law. There are, as we already know, administrative and governmental functions in which certain relations are regulated by repressive law, because of the particular character which the organ

⁷ That is why the law which governs the relations of domestic functions is not penal, although these functions are very general.

of common conscience and everything that relates to it has. In still other cases, the links of solidarity which unite certain social functions can be such that from their break quite general repercussions result invoking a penal sanction. But, for the reason we have given, these counter-blows are exceptional.

This law definitely plays a role in society analogous to that played by the nervous system in the organism. The latter has as its task, in effect, the regulation of the different functions of the body in such a way as to make them harmonize. It thus very naturally expresses the state of concentration at which the organism has arrived, in accordance with the division of physiological labor. Thus, on different levels of the animal scale, we can measure the degree of this concentration according to the development of the nervous system. Which is to say that we can equally measure the degree of concentration at which a society has arrived in accordance with the division of social labor according to the development of co-operative law with restitutive sanctions. We can foresee the great services that this criterion will render us.

Since negative solidarity does not produce any integration by itself, and since, moreover, there is nothing specific about it, we shall recognize only two kinds of positive solidarity which are distinguishable by the following qualities:

1. The first binds the individual directly to society without any intermediary. In the second, he depends upon society, because he depends upon the parts of which it is composed.
2. Society is not seen in the same aspect in the two cases. In the first, what we call society is a more or less organized totality of beliefs and sentiments common to all the members of the group: this is the collective type. On the other hand, the society in which we are solidary in the second instance is a system of different, special functions which definite relations unite. These two societies really make up only one. They are two aspects of one and the same reality, but none the less they must be distinguished.
3. From this second difference there arises another which helps us to characterize and name the two kinds of solidarity.

The first can be strong only if the ideas and tendencies common to all the members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those which pertain personally to each member. It is as much stronger as the excess is more considerable. But what makes our personality is how much of our own individual qualities we have, what distinguishes us from others. This solidarity can grow only in inverse ratio to personality. There are in each of us, as we have said, two consciences: one which is common to our group in its entirety, which, consequently, is not ourself, but society living and acting within us; the other, on the contrary, represents that in us which is personal and distinct, that which makes us an individual.⁸ Solidarity which comes from likenesses is at its maximum when the collective conscience completely envelops our whole conscience and coincides in all points with it. But, at that moment, our individuality is nil. It can be born only if the community takes smaller toll of us. There are, here, two contrary forces, one centripetal, the other centrifugal, which cannot flourish at the same time. We cannot, at one and the same time, develop ourselves in two opposite senses. If we have a lively desire to think and act for ourselves, we cannot be strongly inclined to think and act as others do. If our ideal is to present a singular and personal appearance, we do not want to resemble everybody else. Moreover, at the moment when this

⁸ However, these two consciences are not in regions geographically distinct from us, but penetrate from all sides.

solidarity exercises its force, our personality vanishes, as our definition permits us to say, for we are no longer ourselves, but the collective life.

The social molecules which can be coherent in this way can act together only in the measure that they have no actions of their own, as the molecules of inorganic bodies. That is why we propose to call this type of solidarity mechanical. The term does not signify that it is produced by mechanical and artificial means. We call it that only by analogy to the cohesion which unites the elements of an inanimate body, as opposed to that which makes a unity out of the elements of a living body. What justifies this term is that the link which thus unites the individual to society is wholly analogous to that which attaches a thing to a person. The individual conscience, considered in this light, is a simple dependent upon the collective type and follows all of its movements, as the possessed object follows those of its owner. In societies where this type of solidarity is highly developed, the individual does not appear, as we shall see later. Individuality is something which the society possesses. Thus, in these social types, personal rights are not yet distinguished from real rights.

It is quite otherwise with the solidarity which the division of labor produces. Whereas the previous type implies that individuals resemble each other, this type presumes their difference. The first is possible only in so far as the individual personality is absorbed into the collective personality; the second is possible only if each one has a sphere of action which is peculiar to him; that is, a personality. It is necessary, then, that the collective conscience leave open a part of the individual conscience in order that special functions may be established there, functions which it cannot regulate. The more this region is extended, the stronger is the cohesion which results from this solidarity. In effect, on the one hand, each one depends as much more strictly on society as labor is more divided; and, on the other, the activity of each is as much more personal as it is more specialized. Doubtless, as circumscribed as it is, it is never completely original. Even in the exercise of our occupation, we conform to usages, to practices which are common to our whole professional brotherhood. But, even in this instance, the yoke that we submit to is much less heavy than when society completely controls us, and it leaves much more place open for the free play of our initiative. Here, then, the individuality of all grows at the same time as that of its parts. Society becomes more capable of collective movement, at the same time that each of its elements has more freedom of movement. This solidarity resembles that which we observe among the higher animals. Each organ, in effect, has its special physiognomy, its autonomy. And, moreover, the unity of the organism is as great as the individuation of the parts is more marked. Because of this analogy, we propose to call the solidarity which is due to the division of labor, organic.

At the same time, this chapter and the preceding furnish us with the means to calculate the part which remains to each of these two social links in the total common result which they concur in producing through their different media. We know under what external forms these two types of solidarity are symbolized, that is to say, what the body of juridical rules which corresponds to each of them is. Consequently, in order to recognize their respective importance in a given social type, it is enough to compare the respective extent of the two types of law which express them, since law always varies as the social relations which it governs....

... Not only, in a general way, does mechanical solidarity link men less strongly than organic solidarity, but also, as we advance in the scale of social evolution, it grows ever slacker.

The force of social links which have this origin vary with respect to the three following

conditions:

1. The relation between the volume of the common conscience and that of the individual conscience. The links are as strong as the first more completely envelops the second.
2. The average intensity of the states of the collective conscience. The relation between volumes being equal, it has as much power over the individual as it has vitality. If, on the other hand, it consists of only feeble forces, it can but feebly influence the collective sense. It will the more easily be able to pursue its own course, and solidarity will be less strong.
3. The greater or lesser determination of these same states. That is, the more defined beliefs and practices are, the less place they leave for individual divergencies. They are uniform moulds into which we all, in the same manner, couch our ideas and our actions. The consensus is then as perfect as possible; all consciences vibrate in unison. Inversely, the more general and indeterminate the rules of conduct and thought are, the more individual reflection must intervene to apply them to particular cases. But it cannot awaken without upheavals occurring, for, as it varies from one man to another in quality and quantity, everything that it produces has the same character. Centrifugal tendencies thus multiply at the expense of social cohesion and the harmony of its movements.

On the other hand, strong and defined states of the common conscience are the roots of penal law. But we are going to see that the number of these is less today than heretofore, and that it diminishes, progressively, as societies approach our social type. It is thus that the average intensity and the mean degree of determination of collective states have themselves diminished. From this fact, it is true, we cannot conclude that the total extent of the common conscience has narrowed, for it may be that the region to which penal law corresponds has contracted, and that the remainder have dilated. It can have fewer strong and defined states, and retaliate with a very great number of others. But this growth, if it is real, is altogether equivalent to that which is produced in the individual conscience, for the latter has, at least, grown in the same proportions. If there are more things common to all, there are many more that are personal to each. There is, indeed, every reason for believing that the latter have increased more than the former, for the differences between men have become more pronounced in so far as they are more cultivated. We have just seen that special activities are more developed than the common conscience. It is, therefore, at least probable that, in each particular conscience, the personal sphere is much greater than the other. In any case, the relation between them has at most remained the same. Consequently, from this point of view, mechanical solidarity has gained nothing, even if it has not lost anything. If, on the other hand, we discover that the collective conscience has become more feeble and vaguer, we can rest assured that there has been an enfeeblement of this solidarity, since, in respect of the three conditions upon which its power of action rests, two, at least, are losing their intensity, while the third remains unchanged.

To prove this, it would avail us nothing to compare the number of rules with repressive sanctions in different social types, for the number of rules does not vary exactly with the sentiments the rules represent. The same sentiment can, in effect, be offended in several different ways, and thus give rise to several rules without diversifying itself in so doing. Because there are now more ways of acquiring property, there are also more ways of stealing, but the sentiment of respect for the property of another has not multiplied itself proportionally...