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"Mechanical Solidarity through Likeness"

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Тhe only common characteristic of all crimes is that they consist – except some apparent exceptions with which we shall deal later – in acts universally disapproved of by all members of society.

Сrime shocks sentiments which, for a given social system, are found in all healthy consciences.

It is not possible otherwise to determine the nature of these sentiments, to define them in terms of the function of their particular objects, for these objects have infinitely varied and can still very. Today, there are altruistic sentiments which present this character most markedly; but there was a time, not far distant from ours, when religious, domestic, and a thousand other traditional sentiments had exactly the same effects.

But we have not defined crime when we say that it consists in an offense to collective sentiments, for there are some among these which can be offended without there being a crime... The collective sentiments to which crime corresponds must, therefore, singularize themselves from others by some distinctive; property; they must have a certain average intensity. Not only are they engraved in all consciences, but they are strongly engraved.

They are not hesitant and superficial desires, but emotions and tendencies which are strongly ingrained in us. The proof of this is the extreme slowness with which penal law evolves. Not only is it modified more slowly than custom, but it is the part of positive most refractory to change. Observe, for example, what has been accomplished in legislation since the beginning of the nineteenth century in the different spheres of juridical life; the innovations in the matter of penal law are extremely rare and restricted compared to the multitude of new dispositions introduced into the civil law, commercial law, administrative law, and constitutional law.

It is not sufficient... that the sentiments be strong; they must be precise. In effect, each of them is relatively to a very definite practice. This practice can be simple or complex, positive or negative... but it is always determined. It is a question of doing or not doing this or that, of not killing, not wounding, of pronouncing such a formula, of going through such a rite, etc. On the contrary, sentiments such as filial love or charity are vague aspirations towards very general objects. So penal laws are remarkable for their neatness and precision, while purely moral rules are generally somewhat nebulous.

We are now in a position to come to a conclusion. The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the collective or common conscience. No doubt, it has not a specific organ as a substratum; it is, by definition, diffuse in every reach of society. Nevertheless, it has specific characteristics which make it a distinct reality. It is, in effect, independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed; they pass on and it remains. Moreover, it does not change with each generation, but, on the contrary, it connects successive generations with one another. It is thus an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realised only through them.

Organic Solidarity Due to the Division of Labour

Everybody knows that there is a social cohesion whose cause lies in a certain conformity of all particular consciences to a common type which is none other than the psychic type of society.

There are in us two consciences: one contains states which are personal to each of us and which characterise us, while the states which comprehend the other are common to all society. To simplify the exposition, we hold that the individual appears only in one society. In fact, we take part in several groups and there are several collective consciences in us; but this complication changes nothing with regard to the relation that we are now establishing.

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 make them harmonise. It thus very naturally expresses the state of concentration at which the organism has arrived, in accordance with the division of physiological labour. 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 society has arrived in accordance with the division of social labour according to the development of cooperative law with restitutive sanctions. We can foresee the great services that this criterion will render us.

There are in each of us, as we have said, two consciences: one of which is common to our group in its entirety, which, consequently, is not ourselves, 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.

Solidarity which comes from likeness is at its maximum when the collective conscience completely envelops our whole conscience and coincides in all points with it...

Аt the moment when this solidarity exercises its force, our personality vanishes... 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...

It is quite otherwise with the solidarity which the division of labour produces. Whereas the previous type [mechanical solidarity] implies that individuals resemble each other, this type [organic solidarity] presumes their difference... each one has a sphere of action which is peculiar to him; that is, a personality... on the one hand, each one depends as much more strictly on society as labour is more divided; and, on the other, the activity of each is as much more personal as it is more specialised...

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 his analogy, we propose to call the solidarity which is due to the division of labour, organic.

Progressive Preponderance of Organic Solidairy; its Consequences

It is an historical law that mechanical solidarity which first stands alone, or nearly so, progressively loses ground, and that organic solidarity becomes, little by little, preponderant. But when the way in which men are solidary becomes modified, the structure of societies cannot but change... Consequently... there ought to be two social types which correspond to these two types of solidarity

If we try to construct intellectually the ideal type of a society whose cohesion was exclusively the result of resemblances, we should have to conceive it as an absolutely homogenous mass whose parts are not distinguished from one another... We propose to call the aggregate thus characterised, horde.

We have not yet observed societies which complied with this definition... however, societies... which are most akin to primitivity are formed by a simple repetition of aggregates of this kind...

Each Iroquois tribe, for example, contains a certain number of partial societies... which present all the characteristics we have just mentioned...

We give the name clan to the horde which has ceased to be independent by becoming an element in a more extensive group, and that of segmental societies with a clan base to peoples who are constituted through an association of clans. We say of these societies that they are segmental in order to indicate their formation by the repetition of like aggregates in them... and we say of this elementary aggregate that it is a clan, because this word... expresses its mixed nature, at once familial and political. It is a family in the sense that all the members who compose it are considered as kin to one another...

Organic Solidarity and Contractual Solidarity

In the industrial societies that Spencer speaks of... social harmony comes essentially from the division of labour. It is characterized by a cooperation which is automatically produced through the pursuit by each individual of his own interests. It suffices that each individual consecrate himself to a special function in order, by the force of events, to make himself solidary with others.

For him, industrial solidarity, as he calls it, presents the two following characters:

Since it is spontaneous, it does not require any coercive force either to produce or to maintain it. Society does not have to intervene to assure the harmony which is self established... The sphere of social action would thus grow narrower and narrower, for it would have no other object than that of keeping individuals from disturbing and harming one another...

The hypothesis of a social contract is irreconcilable with the notion of the division of labour... For in order for such a contract to be possible, it is necessary that, at a given moment, all individual wills direct themselves toward the common bases of the social organisation, and, consequently, that each particular conscience pose the political problem for itself in all its generality...

Nothing, however, less resembles the spontaneous automatic solidarity which, according to Spencer, distinguishes industrial societies, for he sees, on the contrary, in this conscious pursuit of social ends the characteristic of military societies.

Such a contract supposes that all individuals are able to represent in themselves the general conditions of the collective life in order to make a choice with knowledge.

Spencer believes that social life, just as all life in general, can naturally organise itself only by an unconscious, spontaneous adaptation under the immediate pressure of needs, and not according to a rational plan of reflective intelligence...

The conception of a social contract is today difficult to defend, for it has no relation to the facts... Not only are there no societies which have such an origin, but there is none whose structure presents the least trace of contractual organisation...

To rejuvenate the doctrine and accredit, it would be necessary to qualify as a contract the adhesion which each individual, as adult, gave to the society when he was born, solely by reason of which he continues to live. But then we would have to term contractual every action of man which is not determined by constraint. In this light, there is no society, neither present nor past, which is not or has not been contractual, for there is none that could exist solely through pressure.

If it has sometimes been thought that force was greater previously than it is today, that is because of the illusion which attributes to a coercive regime the small place given over to individual liberty in lower societies. In reality, social life, wherever it is normal, is spontaneous, and if it is abnormal, it cannot endure.

Higher societies have, according to Spencer, the vast system of particular contracts which link individuals as a unique basis... Social solidarity would then be nothing else than the spontaneous accord of individual interests, an accord of which contracts are the natural expression...

Is this the character of societies whose unity is produced by the division of labour? If this were so, we could with justice doubt their stability. For if interest relates men, it is never for more than some few moments. It can create only an external link between them...

The governmental organ is more or less considerable, not because the people are more or less passive, but rather because its growth is proportional to the progress of the division of labour, societies comprising more different organs the more intimately solidary they are.

Summary

The following propositions sum up the first part of our work. Social life comes from a double source, the likeness of consciences and the division of labour. The individual is socialised in the first case, because not having any real individuality, he becomes with those whom he resembles, part of the same collective type; in the second case, because, whilst having a physiognomy and personal activity which distinguishes him from others, he depends upon them in the same measure that he is distinguished from them, and consequently upon the same society which results from their union.

The similitude of consciences gives rise to juridical rules which, with the threat of repressive measure, imposes uniform beliefs and practices upon all... .

The division of labour gives rise to juridical rules which determine the nature and the relations of divided functions, but whose violation calls forth only restitutive measures without any expiatory character...

Even where society relies most completely upon the division of labour, it does not become a jumble of juxtaposed atoms, between which it can establish only external, transient contacts. Rather the members are united by ties which extend deeper and far beyond the short moments during which the exchange is made. Each of the functions that they exercise is, in a fixed way, dependent on others, and with them forms a solidary system. Accordingly, from the nature of the chosen task permanent duties arise. Because we fill some certain domestic or social function, we are involved in a complex of obligations from which we have no right to free ourselves.

There is, above all, an organ upon which we are tending to depend more and more; this is the State. The points at which we are in contact with it multiply as do the occasions when it is entrusted with the duty of reminding us of the sentiment of common solidarity.

Altruism is not destined to become, as Spencer desires, a sort of agreeable ornament to social life, but it will forever be its fundamental basis...

Every society is a moral society. In certain respects, this character is even more pronounced in organised societies. Because the individual is not sufficient unto himself, it is from society that he receives everything necessary to him, as it is for society that he works.

Thus is formed a very strong sentiment of the state of dependence in which he finds himself. He becomes accustomed to estimating it at its just value, that is to say, in regarding himself as part of the whole, the organ of an organism.

Such sentiments naturally inspire not only mundane sacrifices which assure the regular development of daily social life, but even, on occasion, acts of complete self-renunciation and whole-sale abnegation.

On its side, society learns to regard its members no longer as things over which it has rights, but as co-operators whom it cannot neglect and towards whom it owes duties. Thus it is wrong to oppose a society which comes from a community of beliefs to one which has a co-operative basis, according only to the first a moral character, and seeing in the latter only an economic grouping. In reality, co-operation also has its intrinsic morality.

We thus reach our first conclusion that the proclivity of Protestantism for suicide must relate to the spirit of free inquiry that animates this religion. Let us understand this relationship correctly. Free inquiry itself is only the effect of another cause. When it appears, when men, after having long received their ready made faith from tradition, claim the right to shape it for themselves, this is not because of the intrinsic desirability of free inquiry, for the latter involves as much sorrow as happiness. But it is because men henceforth need this liberty. This very need can have only one cause: the overthrow of traditional beliefs. If they still asserted themselves with equal energy, it would never occur to men to criticise them (p.158).

The beneficent influence of religion is not due to the special nature of religious conceptions. If religion protects men against the desire for self-destruction, it is not that it preaches the respect for his own person to him with arguments sui generis; but because it is a society. What constitutes the society is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory.

If… as has often been said, man is double, that is because social man superimposes himself upon physical man. Social man necessarily presupposes a society which he expresses and serves. If this dissolves, if we no longer feel it in existence and action about and above us, whatever is social in us is deprived of all objective foundation… Yet this social is the essence of civilised man… Thus we are bereft of reasons for existence; for the only life to which we could cling no longer corresponds to anything actual; the only existence still based upon reality no longer meets our needs.

Anomic Suicide

No living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means... In the animal, at least in a normal condition, this equilibrium is established with automatic spontaneity because the animal depends on purely material conditions...

This is not the case with man, because most of his needs are not dependent on his body or not to the same degree... how determine the quantity of well-being, comfort or luxury legitimately to be craved by a human being?... They are unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone... Being unlimited, they constantly and indefinitely surpass the means at their command; they cannot be quenched. Inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture...

The passions... must be limited. Only then can they be harmonised with the faculties and satisfied. But since the individual has no way of limiting them, this must be done by some force exterior to him. A regulative force must play the same role for moral needs which the organism plays for physical needs. This means that the force can only be moral. The awakening of conscience interrupted the state of equilibrium in the animal’s dormant existence; only conscience, therefore, can furnish the means to re-establish it... the appetites... can be halted only by a limit that they recognise as just. Men would never consent to restrict their desires if they felt justified in passing the assigned limit. But... they cannot assign themselves this law of justice. So they must receive it from an authority which they respect, to which they yield spontaneously. Either directly an as a whole, or through the agency of one of its organs, society alone can play this moderating role, for it is the only moral power superior to the individual, the authority of which he accepts.

In normal conditions the collective order is regarded as just by the great majority of persons. Therefore, when we say that an authority is necessary to impose this order on individuals, we certainly do not mean that violence is the only means of establishing it. Since this regulation is meant to restrain individual passions, it must come from a power which dominates individuals; but this power must also be obeyed through respect, not fear.

It is not true, then, that human activity can be released from all restraint. Nothing in the world can enjoy such a privilege. All existence being a part of the universe is relative to the remainder... Man’s characteristic privilege is that the bond he accepts is not physical but moral; that is, social. He is governed not by a material environment brutally imposed on him, but by a conscience superior to his own, the superiority of which he feels. Because the greater, better part of his existence transcends the body, he escapes the body’s yoke, but is subject to that of society.

But when society is disturbed by some painful crisis or by beneficent but abrupt transitions, it is momentarily incapable of exercising this influence; thence come the sudden rises in the curve of suicides which we have pointed out...

In the case of economic disasters, indeed, something like a declassification occurs which suddenly casts certain individuals into a lower state than their previous one. Then they must reduce their requirements, restrain their needs, learn greater self-control. All the advantages of social influence are lost so far as they are concerned; their moral education has to be recommenced. But society cannot adjust them instantaneously to this new life and teach them to practice the increased self-repression to which they are unaccustomed. So they are not adjusted to the condition forced on them, and its very prospect is intolerable; hence the suffering which detaches them from a reduced existence even before they have made trial of it.

It is the same if the source of the crisis is an abrupt growth of power and wealth. Then, truly, as the conditions of life are changed, the standard according to which needs were regulated can no longer remain the same; for it varies with social resources, since it largely determines the share of each class of producers. The scale is upset; but a new scale cannot be immediately improvised. Time is required for the public conscience to reclassify men and things. So long as the social forces thus freed have not regained equilibrium, their respective values are unknown and so all regulation is lacking for a time. The limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, what is just and what is unjust, legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate. Consequently, there is no restraint upon aspirations.

Egoistic suicide results from man’s no longer finding a basis for existence in life; altruistic suicide, because this basis for existence appears to man situated beyond life itself. The third type of suicide... results from man's activity’s lacking regulation and his consequent sufferings. By virtue of its origin we shall assign this last variety the name of anomic suicide.

The conclusion from all these facts is that the social suicide-rate can be explained only sociologically. At any given moment the moral constitution of society establishes the contingent of voluntary deaths. There is, therefore, for each people a collective force of a definite amount of energy, impelling men to self-destruction. The victim’s acts which at first seem to express only his personal temperament are really the supplement and prolongation of a social condition which they express externally.

It is not mere metaphor to say of each human society that it has a greater or lesser aptitude for suicide; the expression is based on the nature of things. Each social group really has a collective inclination for the act quite its own, and the source of all individual inclination, rather than their result.

Originally society is everything, the individual nothing. Consequently, the strongest social feelings are those connecting the individual with the collectivity; society is its own aim. Man is considered only an instrument in its hands; he seems to draw all his rights from it and has no counter-prerogative, because nothing higher than it exists. But gradually things change. As societies become greater in volume and density, they increase in complexity, work is divided, individual differences multiply, and the moment approaches when the only remaining bond among the members of a single human group will be that they are all men.

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