



## Classical Sociological Theory and Foundations of American Sociology



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# I. Division of Labor, Book I

“History shows that as one type progresses, the other type fades away.”

NOTE ON SOURCE: This passage comes from Durkheim's dissertation, completed in 1893, and first published in 1902 as *De la Division du Travail Sociale*. The first English translation was done by George Simpson in 1933, but this version was found to have several shortcomings. A more approved translation was made in 1984 by W. D. Halls, edited by Lewis A. Coser. This translation was republished with some improvement by Steven Lukes in 1997. This is the recommended version if you would like to read more of the text than what is included here.

## Introduction – Why this is important and what to look for

The Division of Labor in Society was divided into three books, as the previous selection demonstrated. The first book examines the function of the division of labor and introduces the distinction between societies held together by Mechanical Solidarity and those held together by Organic Solidarity. The passages below describe those differences. Pay close attention to all the ways in which these two types of society differ.

## Chapter 3. Organic Solidarity due to the Division of Labor

### Part 4. Conclusion

We recognize two kinds of positive solidarity, solidarity which produces integration. The first kind directly binds the individual to society while the second binds the individual indirectly, through reliance on the other people who collectively make up society.

Society is not seen in the same aspect in the two cases. In the first, what we call society is more or less composed of the beliefs and values held in common by all people. In contrast, the second case is composed of a system of different and unique functions which are united through interdependence.

In the first case, society is strong if the ideas and common tendencies are greater quantitatively and qualitatively than those ideas and habits held by individuals. This kind of solidarity can grow only at the expense of individual personality. In each of us there are two consciences, one common to our group and the other which is personal to us and distinct and that makes us an individual. Solidarity through likeness is at its greatest when the collective conscience takes over our entire consciousness, [*when what we think is what society thinks*]. But at that moment we have no personality. Our personalities can only emerge if the community to which we belong has less control of us. These are two opposing forces. If we want to think

and act for ourselves, we cannot also be strongly inclined to think and act as everyone else. So, when this form of solidarity acts on us forcefully, our personality vanishes; we are no longer ourselves but the collective life.

The social molecules which cohere together in this way can act together only if they have no actions of their own; they are molecules of inorganic bodies. For that reason we propose to call this type of solidarity *mechanical*. This doesn't mean it is produced by mechanical or artificial means, but only as an analogy to the cohesion uniting an inanimate body, as opposed to elements of a living body. The individual conscience is dependent upon the collective conscience and follows all its movements, without a life of its own, so to speak. In societies where this type of solidarity is strong, the individual does not really appear. Personal rights are generally not recognized.

It is utterly different when we consider the solidarity which is produced by the division of labor. While the first type implied that individuals resemble each other, this type presumes they are differentiated. While the first type is possible only so much as the individual personality is subsumed by the collective personality, the second type is possible only if each individual person has a sphere of action unique to him or her, and so an individual personality. It is necessary for the collective conscience to recede to allow the individual conscience to operate freely. The more it does so, the stronger the cohesion which results [as each becomes reliant on every other member fulfilling his or her unique sphere of action]. Each one depends more on society as labor is divided, and each person's activity becomes more specialized.

## Chapter 4. Further Proof the Preceding

### *Part 1. [Likeness in Mechanical Solidarity Societies]*

The more societies are primitive, the more alike are its members.

## Chapter 5. Progressive Preponderance of Organic Solidarity; Its Consequences

### *Part 2. [Three Conditions of Mechanical Solidarity]*

Not only does mechanical solidarity bind people together less strongly over time, but we find it slackens as we progress socially.

Indeed, the strength of social links through likeness vary with respect to the following three conditions:

First, the relative proportion of collective and individual conscience. The links are stronger the more the first overshadows the second.

Second, the average intensity of the states of the collective conscience.

Third, The distinctiveness of these states. That is, the more specifically defined are the collective beliefs and practices, the less room there is for individualization. The more general and abstract are the rules, however, the more individual reflection plays a role. Centrifugal tendencies multiply at the cost of social cohesion.

Strong and defined states of the common conscious are the roots of penal law. However, the number of such laws is less today than before, and diminish progressively as societies approach our modern type.

*[Durkheim discusses the relative proportion of what he calls “repressive” laws, violation of which offends the collective conscience, and “restitutive” laws, violation of which is less shocking and more personally related to the parties at hand (think broken contracts). He argues that, as societies advance, the proportional amount of repressive law diminishes as that of restitutive law increases. This is, indeed, a key part of Book 1, and is used to support his argument about changes from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity over time. As anthropologists of law have criticized the empirical facts Durkheim used, limited as they were to what was available to him in the 19th century, you will not find more of this discussion in this reader, but you should know that Durkheim is using evidence, albeit imperfect, to build this theory, rather than engaging in “armchair philosophizing.”]*

## Chapter 6. Progressive Preponderance of Organic Solidarity, continued

### Part 1. Segmental Type

So we can say it is a historical law that mechanical solidarity, which at first stood alone, progressively loses ground and that, over time, little by little, organic solidarity predominates.

If we were to try to imagine an ideal type of society held together exclusively by likeness, we would have to conceive it as one wholly homogeneous, one in which none of its human members are distinguishable from one another; there would be no real organization to speak of. It would be a social protoplasm, a blob, a horde, if you will.

It is true we have yet to find any society that operates completely in this way. *[We do find some glimmers of it, among some Native American tribes, for example. We can designate hordes which form elements in more extensive groups as clans.]*

We can call these societies *segmented* as they are formed by the repetition of like aggregations in them, like the rings of an earthworm. The term *clan* expresses the mixed nature of these segmented groups. The clan is a family because its members are kin to one another. These familial affinities are for the most part what keeps the group united. But these are not families the way we understand families, because kinship need not be by blood. The clan in fact contains a great many strangers. It can comprise several thousand persons. And it is the basic political unity as well, with the clan-heads the only social authorities.

The main point, however, is that the clan, just as the horde, of which it is but an extension, has no other solidarity than that derived from likeness. For segmented organization to be possible, the segments must resemble one another; otherwise, they would not be united.

In these societies, religion pervades all of social life. This is so because social life itself is almost exclusively composed of common beliefs and practices. Where the collective personality is the only one in existence, property also must be collective, so we find an early form of communism operating in these societies.

There is, then, a social structure of a specific kind which corresponds with mechanical solidarity. What characterizes it is a system of segments homogeneous and similar to each other.

## *Part 2. Organized Type*

Quite another thing is the structure of societies where organic solidarity is preponderant.

They are constituted by a system of different organs, each of which has a special role, and which are themselves formed of differentiated parts. Social elements are not heaped together linearly as the rings of an earthworm, nor are they entwined with one another, but rather they are coordinated and subordinated to one another around a central organ which regulates the rest of the organism. Others may depend on this central organ, but the central organ depends on the others as well. *[It is thus unlike a head of a clan, who embodies the collective conscience and to whom all others owe absolute obedience]*. There is nothing superhuman or timeless about this central organ. There are only differences in degree between this organ and the others.

This social type rests on such different principles as that of the segmented type that it can develop only so much as it erases the segmented type. In organized societies, individuals are not grouped based on lineage or bloodline, but according to the particular nature of the social activity they engage in. Their natural context is not that of birth *[blood, race, etc.]* but of occupation. It is no longer real or fictitious kinship which marks the place of each, but the function which he or she fulfills.

No doubt, when this new organization began to appear, it tried to use the existing organization and to assimilate it. So, functions were often allocated based on original divisions of birth. In a way, classes (and castes in particular) probably have their origin thusly. But this mixed arrangement cannot last for long, because there is a fundamental contradiction between the two. It is only a very basic division of labor which can adapt to preexisting social divisions in this way. The division of labor can only grow by freeing itself from this confining framework. As soon as it passes a certain stage of development, there is no longer any relation between the hereditarily fixed properties of segments and the new skills and aptitudes called forth by the growth of functions needed in society. The social material must combine in new ways to organize itself upon these different foundations. The old structure, so far as it persists, is opposed to these new combinations. Which is why it must disappear.

Thus the history shows that as one type progresses, the other type fades away.

Just as we could not say there was any known wholly segmented society, we also observe that there is as yet no wholly organized society. We do see, however, that organic solidarity is progressing, and becoming more preponderant.

Our future investigations will show that our current occupational organization is not everything it should be, as abnormal causes have prevented it from attaining the degree of development which our social order now demands. *[More on that in Book 3]*

## Questions

1. If thinking for ourselves and thinking for the community are mutually opposed, as Durkheim suggests, where do YOU lie on this continuum? If you had been born in, say, 1300CE, do you think your answer would have been different? What about 1300BCE? Why?
2. Durkheim has been claimed as an early anthropologist, and much of his theory developed in *The Division of Laboris* based on observational and historical data about “primitive” peoples, including Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians, and early Jewish peoples. Much of this is inaccurate and/or biased by Eurocentric thinking. In Chapter 6, Durkheim draws copiously from early anthropological thinking to describe how “segmented” societies (the horde, the clan) operate. Given the problems with the data used, is his theory still valid? Explain your answer. For those of you who are familiar with the world of *Star Trek*, it might be helpful for you to think of the “horde” as The Borg.
3. When Durkheim talks about “the central organ” that “regulates” the other members, to what is he referring? If you are asked to describe Durkheim’s theory of the state in modern society, would this passage help?
4. It may be hard for us, who develop in what Durkheim would call organized societies, to recognize the pull of “birth” to which he refers in part 2 of Chapter 6. You may want to consider what it might be like to live in a society in which all that mattered was who your ancestors were. Can you think of historical examples when this might have been the case? Compare Durkheim’s “birth vs. occupation” to Weber’s “status vs. class.”

## Concepts

Segmented Society

Collective Conscience

Organized Society

Mechanical Solidarity (and MS Societies)

Organic Solidarity (and OS Societies)