

selves, referring it to an existence we think of as exterior and superior to ourselves, since it commands us and we obey. Of course, whatever seems to us to come from the same origin shares the same quality. Thus we have been forced to imagine a world beyond this one and to people it with realities of a different order.

Such is the source of all the ideas of transcendency which form the bases of religions and morals; for moral obligation is explicable only in this way. To be sure, the definite form in which we usually clothe these ideas is without scientific value. Whether we ascribe them to a personal being of a special nature or to some abstract force which we vaguely hypostasize under the title of moral ideal, they are solely metaphorical conceptions, giving no adequate explanation of the facts. But the process which they symbolize is none the less real. It remains true that in every case we are urged to act by an authority exceeding ourselves, namely society, and that the aims to which it attaches us thus enjoy real moral supremacy. If so, all the objections applicable to the common conceptions by which men have tried to represent this sensed supremacy to themselves cannot lessen its reality. Such criticism is superficial, not reaching to the basis of things. If it is demonstrable that exaltation of human personality is one of the aims pursued, and which should be pursued, by modern societies, all moral regulation deriving from this principle is justified by that fact itself, whatever the manner of its usual justification. Though the reasons satisfying the crowd are open to criticism, they need only be transposed into another idiom to be given their full import.

Now, not only is this aim really one of the aims of modern societies, but it is a law of history that peoples increasingly detach themselves from every other objective. 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,³⁰ and

³⁰ See my *Division du travail social*, bk. II.

the moment approaches when the only remaining bond among the members of a single human group will be that they are all men. Under such conditions the body of collective sentiments inevitably attaches itself with all its strength to its single remaining object, communicating to this object an incomparable value by so doing. Since human personality is the only thing that appeals unanimously to all hearts, since its enhancement is the only aim that can be collectively pursued, it inevitably acquires exceptional value in the eyes of all. It thus rises far above all human aims, assuming a religious nature.

This cult of man is something, accordingly, very different from the egoistic individualism above referred to, which leads to suicide. Far from detaching individuals from society and from every aim beyond themselves, it unites them in one thought, makes them servants of one work. For man, as thus suggested to collective affection and respect, is not the sensual, experiential individual that each one of us represents, but man in general, ideal humanity as conceived by each people at each moment of its history. None of us wholly incarnates this ideal, though none is wholly a stranger to it. So we have not to concentrate each separate person upon himself and his own interests, but to subordinate him to the general interests of humankind. Such an aim draws him beyond himself; impersonal and disinterested, it is above all individual personalities; like every ideal, it can be conceived of only as superior to and dominating reality. This ideal even dominates societies, being the aim on which all social activity depends. This is why it is no longer the right of these societies to dispose of this ideal freely. While we recognize that they too have their reason for existence, they have subjected themselves to the jurisdiction of this ideal and no longer have the right to ignore it; still less, to authorize men themselves to do so. Our dignity as moral beings is therefore no longer the property of the city-state; but it has not for that reason become our property, and we have not acquired the right to do what we wish with it. How could we have such a right if society, the existence greater than ourselves, does not have it?

Under these conditions suicide must be classed among immoral acts; for in its main principle it denies this religion of humanity. A man

who kills himself, the saying goes, does wrong only to himself and there is no occasion for the intervention of society; for so goes the ancient maxim *Volenti non fit injuria*. This is an error. Society is injured because the sentiment is offended on which its most respected moral maxims today rest, a sentiment almost the only bond between its members, and which would be weakened if this offense could be committed with impunity. How could this sentiment maintain the least authority if the moral conscience did not protest its violation? From the moment that the human person is and must be considered something sacred, over which neither the individual nor the group has free disposal, any attack upon it must be forbidden. No matter that the guilty person and the victim are one and the same; the social evil springing from the act is not affected merely by the author being the one who suffers. If violent destruction of a human life revolts us as a sacrilege, in itself and generally, we cannot tolerate it under any circumstances. A collective sentiment which yielded so far would soon lose all force.

Of course, this does not mean that we must revert to the ferocious penalties imposed on suicide during the past centuries. They were established at a time when, under the influence of temporary circumstances, the entire system of public repression was enforced with excessive severity. But the principle that homicide of one's self should be reprovved must be maintained. It remains to determine by what external tokens this reprobation is to be shown. Are moral sanctions enough or must there be juridical ones, and if so, what? This is a question of application which shall be treated in the next chapter.

II

But in order better to decide to what extent suicide partakes of immorality, let us examine first its relation with other immoral acts, especially crimes and misdemeanors.

According to Lacassagne there is consistently an inverse relation between the variations of suicide and those of crimes against property (qualified thefts, incendiarism, fraudulent bankruptcies, etc.). This thesis was defended in his name by one of his pupils, Dr. Chaussinand,