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An Exchange between Durkheim and Tönnies on the Nature of Social Relations, with an Introduction by Joan Aldous¹

INTRODUCTION

Ferdinand Tönnies was already well established at the University of Kiel and working on his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* in 1885 when Émile Durkheim's first contributions to sociological literature began appearing in the publication *Revue philosophique*. This journal, edited by Théodule Ribot, one of the fathers of French psychology, found a place for articles on psychology and psychopathology as well as sociology, disciplines at the time only recently separated from philosophy. The analyses Durkheim supplied of various contemporary sociological works went beyond the short book summary and reviewer's judgment we are accustomed to reading today. These critiques, which initiated his own series of publications, not only supplied the reader with the important ideas of the author, but also provided Durkheim with an opportunity to display his own thoughts on the subject in question. When Tönnies's classic appeared in 1887, Durkheim had already reviewed works by Spencer, Schäffle, and Gumpłowicz (Alpert 1939), as well as other sociologists whose names have now largely been forgotten. The assignment to review *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, however, came at a particularly opportune time.

The year 1887 marked Durkheim's appointment to the University of Bordeaux, his first university position. More important, his doctoral dissertation, which would appear in 1893 as *De la division du travail social: Étude sur l'organisation des sociétés*, was already taking shape. The review (Durkheim 1889), while presenting Tönnies's views, gave Durkheim the opportunity to examine them in relation to the thesis he was in the process of developing. It is Durkheim's critique that catches the sociologist's attention. Here he outlines the thoughts which, as he notes, would require a book to explain fully. And, of course, what we know as *The Division of Labor in Society* became that book.

In the review itself, Durkheim expresses his conviction that, contrary to Tönnies's argument, *Gesellschaft* societies are no less natural than *Gemeinschaft* communities. In his own work, as Sorokin (1928, p. 491) remarks, Durkheim seems to have labeled his own two societal types op-

¹ Without Lerke Gravenhorst's search of the German literature, we would not have Tönnies's reply to Durkheim. I am also grateful to her and to Vera Cerny for their skillful translation of Tönnies. Mrs. Cerny and Reuben Hill checked my translation of Durkheim and made it more readable, which I and my readers appreciate.

posite those of Tönnies. By labeling the integration existing in the highly urbanized great societies of his own day as "organic," Durkheim not only could use the organism analogy but could also point up his own conviction that group life there was as natural as in precommercial societies. Those like-minded communities he characterized as possessing mechanical solidarity.

Tönnies read Durkheim's review and apparently had some lively reactions. These did not appear in print until 1896, when he took the occasion offered by the appearance of *The Division of Labor* to defend his position in a short commentary on Durkheim's book (Tönnies 1896). The commentary appeared in an annual review of the developments in sociology which he prepared for the *Archiv für systematische Philosophie*. This journal, like the *Revue philosophique*, served as a bridge between philosophy and the social sciences, publishing articles by Husserl, Rickert, and Simmel's only doctoral student, Salomon. Tönnies makes apt use of Durkheim's own words of criticism of Tönnies's argument to document his "surprise" that Durkheim, too, should analyze societal development in terms of a dichotomy similar to his own. It is clear, however, that the issue of the similarity or difference between Durkheim's dichotomy and his own is of secondary importance to Tönnies. His concern, one he believed distinctive to himself, had to do with people's attitudes toward society. He does present an answer to Durkheim's criticism of the unnatural character of his *Gesellschaft* type by pointing to possible similarities in attitudes toward society of persons in both small villages and large cities. But the possible organic nature of *Gesellschaft* is a side issue to him. One difference between himself and Durkheim that Tönnies was willing to emphasize was his more pessimistic view of life in complex societies.

Posterity, however, unfamiliar with Tönnies's rejoinder to Durkheim, tends to remember the *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* division and his critiques of the great society. Perhaps the publication of this exchange between the two men will serve to recall the similarities underlying the societal types Tönnies delineated, as well as the problem with societal dichotomies that Durkheim recognized but did not entirely solve (Parsons 1947)—the problem of how one type can be said to have evolved from the other.

The exchange should certainly serve to remind the present generation of sociologists that intellectual controversy has always accompanied the sociological endeavor. Whether it is criticism of the other's writing style, or noting that the other's works stems from that of earlier thinkers, Durkheim and Tönnies are intent on developing their own theses. Thus, in the 1890s, as in the 1970s, some sociologists are able to use discussion

with their own fellows as occasions to demonstrate their creativity as well as their commitment to the discipline.

JOAN ALDOUS

University of Minnesota

A REVIEW OF FERDINAND TÖNNIES'S *GEMEINSCHAFT UND GESELLSCHAFT: ABHANDLUNG DES COMMUNISMUS UND DES SOCIALISMUS ALS EMPIRISCHER CULTURFORMEN*²

Although this work is first of all a social science study, some diverse views of nature are intermingled in it. At the same time that one will find a complete sociology, one will also find a complete philosophy and a complete psychology. Schopenhauer, Karl Marx, Kant, Sumner Maine, the evolutionists, in turn, or simultaneously, inspire the author. Such an eclectic synthesis naturally makes the reading of the book very laborious, and it is a pity, for one finds interesting ideas there that we will try to disentangle. We will set aside everything that deals with general philosophy in order to examine what particularly interests the sociologist.

As the title indicates, the author proposes to analyze two concepts, which he labels *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. These are the two group forms, the two forms of social life, that one observes among men. To characterize each one and to determine their relation is the object of this study.

Gemeinschaft is the community. It constitutes an absolute unity which is incompatible with the distinction of parts. To merit the name community even if it is organized, a group is not a collection of individuals differing from one another; it is a mass, undifferentiated and compact, which is only capable of movement together, and is directed by the mass itself, or by one of its parts entrusted with directing it. It is an aggregate of minds so strongly cohesive that no one is able to stir independently of the others. In a word, it is a community where, if you wish, communism is carried to the highest point of perfection. The whole alone exists; it alone has an action sphere peculiar to itself. The parts do not have one.

What keeps individuals unified and intermingled in this case is what the author calls *Verständniss* ("consensus"). It is the silent and spontaneous accord of several minds which think and feel alike, which are open to one another, which experience in common all their impressions, their joys like their sorrows, which, in a word, resonate in unison. This harmony is not produced as the result of a preliminary agreement or of

² (Leipzig, 1887), pp. xxx+294.

a contract previously debated and bearing on determined points. But it is a necessary product of the character of things, of the state of minds. When the conditions are favorable and when the seed from which harmony is born is given, it grows and develops by a kind of spontaneous vegetation process.

In order for the minds at this point to be intermingled, in order that they thereby participate in the life of one another, it is necessary that they be of the same character, or that they at least have among them great resemblances, and that is why the consanguineal community is the source par excellence of all kinds of community. In other words, the most perfect example of the kind of group we are analyzing is the family. Moreover, the family is at the same time its source and origin. It is from the family that all types of community are born. And since the family has its source in the physiological constitution of man, it is also the source of *Gemeinschaft*. The latter, therefore, is of absolute natural origin. It is an organic group, and as we will see, it is by this character that it is fundamentally distinguished from *Gesellschaft*.

If the family is the most perfect form of *Gemeinschaft*, it is not the only one. Besides, the family already contains in itself properties, elements, and diverse modes of combination which give birth to a diversity of groups. Organic resemblance is not the only bond which ties members of the family one to the other. Organic resemblance is often completely lacking between the spouses. It does not always exist between brothers and sisters. What assures the cohesion of the domestic society, besides consanguinity, is the fact of living together in the same space; it is also the community of memories, a necessary consequence of a common existence. These two social bonds are able to develop even if the bond of consanguinity is weakened and may be substituted for it. In such an event, these ties may each give birth to a particular kind of *Gemeinschaft*. It happens, for example, that by the sole fact of being in the neighborhood and of the relations that derive from it, families, until then independent, aggregate together; then one sees produced what Sumner Maine has called the "Village Community." Although that kind of community is more fully realized in the village than elsewhere, it can still be found in the town, on the condition that the town does not surpass certain dimensions and does not become the great city of today. As for the community of memories and occupations, it is this community which gives birth to colleagues, to associations, political, economic, or religious, in which are found united all those who give themselves to the same function, have the same beliefs, and feel the same needs.

But under these diverse forms, *Gemeinschaft* always presents the same

general properties. We have indicated the most essential; others flow from them.

In *Gemeinschaft*-type societies where the individuals are not distinguishable one from another, property tends to be communal. All members of the group work at common tasks and derive enjoyment from this communality (p. 32). Property in the modern sense of the word does not exist; possession (*Besitz*) is collective possession. Consequently, there is no phenomenon of exchange. Exchange between two or more independent families is conceivable, to be sure, but not between the members of the same family. Things possessed in common do not circulate but remain immovable, attached to the group. Thus, land is the essential form of property. The labors of private persons are not for wages, that is to say, sold according to a discussed price. Each works not for compensation, but because it is his natural function. He receives in return a share of the common possessions determined not by the law of supply and demand but by tradition, the sentiment of the group as represented generally by the will of the head.

Since there is no exchange, there can be no question of a contract. A contract presupposes two individuals present of whom each has his own will, his interests, and his sphere of action, on the one hand, and, on the other, an object which passes from the hands of one into those of the other. Now we have just seen that these conditions are not realized in pure *Gemeinschaft*. Within the group, there is no interchange, no movement in the arrangement of the parts, since there are not, so to speak, separable parts. The life of the group is not a work of individual wills but is completely directed by group habits, customs, and traditions. Contrasting the word "status" with the term "contract," and in general with all relations which result from negotiated agreements, the author chooses the first of these expressions, namely, "status" to characterize *Gemeinschaft*.

But there is another mode of grouping; this is what we are able to observe in the large cities of contemporary societies. It is in such metropolitan centers that one can observe in almost its purest form what Tönnies calls *Gesellschaft*.

Gesellschaft implies "a circle of men who, as in *Gemeinschaft*, live and dwell in peace, the one beside the other, but instead of being essentially joined are on the contrary essentially separated. While in *Gemeinschaft* they remain linked in spite of distinctions, here they remain distinct despite all the links. As a consequence, activities cannot be found which are able to be inferred from a unity existing a priori and necessarily, which expresses the will and the mind of that unity. . . . But each is here

for himself and in a state of hostility vis-à-vis the others. The various fields of activities and of power are strongly fixed, the one in regard to the others, so that each prohibits all contact and all mingling. . . . Nobody is able to make anything for another unless it is in exchange for a similar service, or for a compensation, that he judges to be equivalent to that which he has given. . . . Only the prospect of a profit would lead one to give up a property that he possesses" (pp. 46-47).

This is obviously the very opposite of *Gemeinschaft*. Individual minds, far from merging within *Gesellschaft*, are differentiated and even opposed to the other. While the first form of society is that which Hegel, for example, prefers to describe, one recognizes in the second the theory of Bentham. According to the author, these two types of social life that one contrasts habitually and that one presented as excluding one another, have both existed and have been successively developed in the course of history. The second is born of the first: *Gesellschaft* from *Gemeinschaft*. How is this connection made? The interpenetration of minds which the community assumes is possible only in small groups. For it is in that condition only that people are able to know each other quite intimately. As social aggregates have become larger, society weighs less heavily on the individual. He finds himself, therefore, quite naturally freed from social ties. Indeed, this is the spectacle that we are witnessing today. Moreover, emancipation is progressive; the beginnings of it go back to the distant past and it has not yet reached its apogee.

Thus, while in *Gemeinschaft* the whole had primacy over the parts, now under *Gesellschaft* the parts are given precedence over the whole. The latter is formed only by the juxtaposition of the separate parts. That is why, while the composition of *Gemeinschaft* is organic, that of *Gesellschaft* is mechanical. Such is the essential difference from which the others are derived.

To deduce the main characteristics of *Gesellschaft* would be a useless exercise if it were only to communicate the concept to readers. It is very similar to Spencer's industrial society. It is seen in the reign of individualism in the sense in which this word is generally understood. The regime of *status* is, under *Gesellschaft*, replaced by the regime of *contracts*. Since individual wills are no longer absorbed in the collective will but are placed, so to speak, opposite one another in the full sense of their independence, the only thing that could put an end to this state of war is a treaty of peace consciously signed, that is to say, a signed agreement or contract. The immanent and unconscious law of *Gemeinschaft* is now replaced by a deliberate law, a contractual law. Opinions freely reflected upon, that is, science, succeed beliefs that reigned by the force of tradition. Property also individualized becomes mobile and money appears. It is the era of

commerce, of industry, especially of large-scale industry, of great cities, of free exchange, and of cosmopolitanism. In sum, one sees that the society which Tönnies paints at this moment is the capitalistic society of the socialists; and, in fact, the author often borrows the somber colors with which he presents this type of society from Karl Marx and from Lassalle.

As with these writers, such a society appears impossible to him without great power being accorded the state. The state is necessary to insure the execution of individual agreements, to sanction contractual law, to put obstacles in the way of all that could be harmful to the general interest of society. It is necessary that this state be strong to contain all the individual wills, all the individual interests that are no longer bound to one another, all the unchained lusts. One understands now the sense of the subtitle of the book, *Abhandlung des Communismus und Socialismus als empirischer Culturformen* [Study of communism and socialism considered as empirical (historical?) forms of civilization]. Communism is the regime of *Gemeinschaft*, as socialism is that of *Gesellschaft*. The one and the other are not, therefore, ideological conceptions destined to be realized in the future, but real facts which are produced in history according to a determined order. As *Gesellschaft* is born of *Gemeinschaft*, socialism is born of communism and replaces it.

But, while the socialists hail *Gesellschaft*, the regime of their preference as the ideal end of progress, Tönnies sees in it only an inevitable consequence of social evolution and even suggests it may be the forerunner of society's final dissolution. He speaks of *Gesellschaft*, therefore, without enthusiasm but with impartiality, as a natural and necessary phenomenon. It is indispensable that the state form and develop in order that *Gesellschaft* be able to endure; but on the other hand, it is able to exercise on the members of society only a mechanical action which cannot last indefinitely. By completely artificial coercion, it is able to restrain for a time all the internal contradictions, all the discords that work within the society, but sooner or later they will end by breaking out. There is true power only in the extent to which it represents common ideas, common interests. For as *Gemeinschaft* declines, the numbers of these common ideas and the importance of these common interests also become progressively fewer. The state of internal war that the society discloses cannot fail, sooner or later, to produce, as natural consequences, the rupturing of all social bonds and the decomposition of the social organism. Thus, the life of society comprises two great phases, communism and socialism, but the latter is the beginning of an end more or less close. It was thus that the Greco-Roman society died, and in this moment we see again the same process unrolling before our eyes.

Such is the conclusion of the Tönnies book. The material that it contains, even though in a small volume, is in reality too vast to be able to discuss the author's theories in depth. I wish only to disentangle the points on which it would be profitable to have a discussion.

Like the author, I believe that there are two major types of societies, and the words which he uses to designate them indicate quite well their nature: it is regrettable that they are not translatable. Like him, I admit that *Gemeinschaft* is the first to develop and that *Gesellschaft* is the derived end. Finally, I accept his general guidelines of analysis and the description that he makes for us of *Gemeinschaft*.

But the point where I part company from him is with his theory of *Gesellschaft*. If I have understood his thinking, *Gesellschaft* would be characterized by a progressive development of individualism that the state could forestall only for a time and by artificial procedures. It would be essentially a mechanical aggregate; all that would still remain of the truly collective life would result not from internal spontaneity, but from the impetus of the state. In a word, as I have said above, it is society as Bentham has imagined it. Now I believe that all the life of great social agglomerations is as natural as that of small aggregations. It is neither less organic nor less internally activated. Beyond purely individual actions there is in our contemporary societies a type of collective activity which is just as natural as that of the less extended societies of former days. It constitutes a different type, but between the two species from the same genus, as diverse as they are, there is not a difference in their basic natures. In order to prove it, a book is necessary; I can only formulate the proposition. Is it, moreover, likely that in the evolution of the same phenomenon, a society would begin as an organic unity and end as a pure mechanism? There is so little continuity between these two types of society that it is impossible to conceive how they could be part of the same development. To reconcile in that manner the [organic] theory of Aristotle and [the mechanistic] view of Bentham is simply to juxtapose opposites. It is necessary to choose: if the society is a fact of nature in its origin, it remains so until the end of its career.

But, in what does the collective life of *Gesellschaft* consist? The method that the author follows does not permit me to reply to this question, for it is completely ideological. In the second part of his work especially, Tönnies elaborates concepts more than he observes the facts about the phenomenon delineated by his concepts. He proceeds dialectically, making those distinctions and those symmetrical classifications of concepts so dear to the German logician. A better way to reach his goal would have been to proceed inductively, that is to say, to study the *Gesellschaft* phenomenon through the laws and the mores that are appropriate

to it and which would reveal its structure. But, whatever reservations have been made here, one cannot fail to recognize in this book truly forceful thinking and an uncommon power of organization.

ÉMILE DURKHEIM

A REVIEW OF ÉMILE DURKHEIM'S *DE LA DIVISION
DU TRAVAIL SOCIAL*³

For detailed data on the content of this work, I refer the reader to Schmoller's review (in *Jahrbuch* 18:286 ff.) and Barth (in *Vierteljahrschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie* 1895, pp. 101 ff.). Durkheim wrote some years ago referring to my theories (in *Revue philosophique* 27:421), "Like the author I think that there are two major types of social structures. The words he uses for their specification are well chosen to show their nature; unfortunately, they are untranslatable. Like him, I admit that *Gemeinschaft* is the primary fact, *Gesellschaft* is its derived end. Finally, I also accept in its general form his analysis and description of *Gemeinschaft*." Further on, he objected to my (not properly understood) term of *Gesellschaft*: "There is so little continuity between these two types of society [the organic and the mechanical] that it is impossible to conceive how they could be part of the same development."

After this statement, it is most surprising to find in Durkheim's book a differentiation of a primitive and a derived "solidarity," one of which is based either on an analogous way of thinking or on common ideas and tendencies (p. 138), while the other is based on individual differences and on the consequent division of labor. It is further surprising that the first has been named mechanical, because the mutual relations of the individuals are said to be similar to those of molecules in an inorganic body, and the other is named organic, because the differentiation of its parts is similar to that of organs in higher animals (p. 140).

If, after this statement, Barth (1895, p. 105) says that my presentation of this relation is completely the reverse, that I consider primitive social structures as organisms and the later evolved forms as mechanisms, I cannot accept his presentation as being true. What I referred to were the possible kinds of positive attitudes of people toward each other, hence those of the individual toward the social entirety. My types are as follows: the entirety is perceived and considered as goal, that is, as a natural whole; or the entirety is perceived and considered as a means for individual goals and consequently as an intentionally devised tool.

I understand both kinds of structures in a sense completely different

³ (Paris 1893). I have divided Tönnies's review into paragraphs; in its original form, there were none.

from that of Durkheim, Barth, and all other sociologists known to me. I understand them in the first range according to their (expressed in the old technical language) *esse objectivum*, and I am delineating the progressive rationalization and externalization of these relations which derive from these *esse objectivum* and reach their climax in the conceptions of the universal society and the universal state. This doctrine of mine is basically indifferent toward the theory that the *esse formale* of the social life or that of *Gesellschaft* is organic. I have never had any doubt about the possibility of comparing the mutual effects in the developed political economy with organic mutual effects. My conceptions do not exclude in any way the fact that ruling and other active corporations or individuals in a big nation as well as in a village or town community take an attitude toward their entirety as organs do toward an organism. However, I do not find very instructive the way in which Mr. Durkheim presents the social types and their mutual relations. He deals with the division of labor pedantically without the critical analysis which many times was praised in Bücher's works. In addition, I objected several times to his failure also to consider the negative side of the entire evolution.

The essential subject of Durkheim's work is the moral value of the division of labor; he expects public opinion increasingly to turn toward the goal of making the division of labor an object of obligation. Thus belonging to positive and current morals, it unfolds its real (natural) moral value. The author is defending the division of labor against the reproach of diminishing human personality. The entire sociology of Durkheim is a modification of Spencer's sociology. In the way this perspective is criticized as well as in several other commentaries, I found some thoughts I agree with.

FERDINAND TÖNNIES

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