

# **MORAL TRIBES: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them**

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## **Moral Tribes Key Idea #1: Cooperation between groups is often undermined by self-interest or a group's own sense of morality.**

The world is changing rapidly, but humans are still biologically much the same. Evolution has given us the skills to cooperate *within* groups, but unfortunately, our ability to cooperate *between* groups still leaves much to be desired. The history of conflict is enough to tell us that.

Mutually beneficial cooperation is endangered by many things, but the clearest threat is what's known as *the tragedy of the commons*.

This is fancy sociology speak for the conflict between self-interest and collective interest: in other words, *Me Versus Us/ You*.

Imagine that Art is journeying alone through the Wild West. He spots the silhouette of another traveler up ahead at a watering hole. Art isn't sure whether the stranger is armed, but Art does have his pistols with him. They meet and size each other up as their horses drink at the watering hole.

If Art thinks selfishly, there's little to be lost if he shoots Bud, the stranger. There'd be no chance of Art getting robbed, for starters. But let's say that Art opts not to shoot Bud, for now. When Art later nods off, Bud spikes his whiskey with poison. Bud, you see, is also afraid of being robbed. When Art wakes, he changes his mind and shoots Bud dead. Then he unwittingly knocks back the poisoned whiskey and dies. If Art and Bud had been less self-interested and instead acted cooperatively, neither would have died. That's the tragedy of the commons.

A second threat to mutually beneficial cooperation is known as *the tragedy of commonsense morality*. This time it's a question of *Us Versus Them*. In other words, one group sets its own values against those of another.

An excellent example of this mentality is demonstrated by the story of the Danish political newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. In response to the Islamic hadith forbidding visual depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, it published a series of cartoons satirizing Muhammad in 2005. The general

climate was also important: there was an ongoing debate about journalists self-censoring their views on Islam.

Global media outlets followed the controversy. Before long, violent protests sprang up around the Muslim world. Over a hundred people were killed, and Danish embassies in Syria, Lebanon and Iran were set on fire.

The two groups – Danish journalists and Muslims – were each fighting for what they saw as commonsense morality. The journalists hated feeling censored, while Muslims didn't want their religion disrespected. But the end result was conflict. This is how commonsense morality can lead to tragedy.

## **Moral Tribes Key Idea #2: The prisoner's dilemma gives us an insight into the functioning of moral principles.**

A famous thought experiment is often cited when questions of morality arise. It's called *the prisoner's dilemma*. To explain it we'll have to return to our friends Art and Bud.

This time, Art and Bud have teamed up and started robbing banks together. Eventually, the sheriff arrests them, but he doesn't have enough evidence to pin the crime on the pair. To get solid convictions, the sheriff needs to wheedle a confession out of them. So the heisters are split up and given a moral puzzle: if Art confesses but Bud doesn't, then Art receives a one-year sentence and Bud gets ten, and vice versa. However, if they both confess, they each get an eight-year sentence. And if they keep quiet? Well, that's two years each.

This begs the question: which moral principles dictate Art and Bud's decision-making?

First off, their choices are probably affected by their relationship to one another.

If Art and Bud were brothers, they'd be significantly less inclined to confess and so betray their sibling.

Equally, if they thought that they could have a successful future partnership as bank robbers, staying quiet would certainly do them both good.

However, if the pair of strangers didn't care about each other, they'd be much more likely to confess. After all, that way they'd each receive a one-year or an eight-year sentence instead of a two-year or a ten-year one.

No matter what the other does, the end result for either is better if they choose to confess. That means the most likely outcome is that they'd get eight years each.

There's another factor that might affect the decision-making process: possible future repercussions.

For instance, Art could threaten Bud with murder if he dares to confess. However, intimidation isn't always the best strategy. In this case, Art would have to wait ten years before he could get his hands on Bud. And besides, murder is a risky business.

Now imagine the two are part of a cartel, the League of Tight-Lipped Bank Robbers. Each member swears to keep to a strict code of silence. He who fails to cooperate must face violent repercussions from the others. In this case, Art and Bud won't be singing any time soon.

We read dozens of other great books like *Moral Tribes*, and summarised their ideas in this article called *Life purpose*  
[Check it out here!](#)

## **Moral Tribes Key Idea #3: Utilitarianism recognizes that each of us deserves equal happiness but undervalues people's rights in the process.**

Ask yourself, why did you go to work today? Most likely for your paycheck. And why do you need the money? For food. And the food? Well, it's because you want to keep living. And why live? So you can spend your time with friends and family, and be happy. No matter what the precise sequence is, you're going to realize that what matters, in the end, is happiness.

This is where *utilitarianism* can be your guide. The philosophy holds that the most important concern when making moral decisions is happiness.

To better understand this, let's look at another famous thought experiment, *the footbridge dilemma*.

Imagine that a train carriage is hurtling out of control toward five railway workers. If struck, they will be killed. You are standing on a footbridge overlooking the tracks. Next to you is another man carrying a large backpack. You realize the only way to save the five workers is to hurl this heavily loaded man onto the tracks below. This would kill him instantaneously but also stop the carriage and save the workers. So is pushing the man off the bridge morally acceptable?

Well, according to the principles of utilitarianism, you're going to have to give him a shove. As each life is equal, this will ensure the greater happiness of the five at the cost of one life.

It's easy to see the problem with utilitarianism when we roleplay the footbridge dilemma: it clearly doesn't value individual rights at all highly.

That's because utilitarians think it's fine to overlook an individual's happiness if the end result is greater overall happiness.

Here's another example: imagine you live in a society where a minority of the populace is enslaved. If the majority are happy with this state of affairs, their overall happiness totals more than that of the enslaved minority. That's fine as far as utilitarianism is concerned, but extremely morally dubious.

Slavery generates riches for some, but incredible anguish for others. When we look at the positives and negatives, it's clear that the moral negatives shouldn't be ignored. You can't just weigh one against the other.

If we use utilitarianism to make moral decisions, we shouldn't forget the inalienable rights of individuals in the process. These rights should not be dismissed just because the happiness of a majority group is quantifiably larger.

## **Moral Tribes Key Idea #4: Moral thinking comes in two modes: automatic or manual.**

The modern camera is a wonder of technology. A photographer can choose the automatic point-and-shoot mode or else use the manual setting, exerting greater control over the outcome. It's a nice analogy for moral thinking, where we also have two modes: *automatic* and *manual*.

The researchers Baba Shiv and Alexander Fedorikhin proved this in an experiment in 1999. In their study, the participants were told to memorize a number, walk down a hallway and tell a tester the number.

Half of the participants were given a two-digit number to memorize, the other half a seven-digit number. Clearly, the second group had the greater cognitive task.

In the hallway, subjects were instructed to take one of two snack options, either a healthy piece of fruit or a slice of rich chocolate cake.

It turned out that those under a higher cognitive load were 50 percent more likely to opt for the chocolate cake.

This happened because they were in *automatic mode*. In other words, they were guided by intuition and emotion.

Our automatic mode only cares for what we can get in the moment. In this case, the rich charms of cake were hard to resist. The automatic mode is built up from our accumulated responses shaped by genes, cultural experiences, as well as trial and error.

*Manual mode*, however, works differently. In it, reasoning and thinking play a key role.

The controlled manual mode mulls over short- and long-term benefits. So in Shiv and Fedorikhin's experiment, it reminded participants with lower cognitive loads that the fruit was better for them.

The general lesson here is clear: automatic thinking leads to more errors but allows for easier decision-making, without overloading the conscious mind. Equally, as we saw with the participants who had to remember seven digits, the automatic mode is a fallback option when the manual mode is busy.

## **Moral Tribes Key Idea #5: Who we help depends on how personal our connection to them feels.**

Imagine you're walking in a park, dressed up in very expensive \$500 clothing. You see a child drowning in a pond. Theoretically, it'd be easy enough to save the child's life by diving in yourself, but you'd destroy your clothes in the process. Of course, that's no real dilemma at all: you'd choose the child over your clothes every time.

The real question is, why is it morally acceptable to spend so much on a suit in the first place. Just think – that money could have been used by a charity for all sorts of things, saving many more children.

Much the same dynamic exists for empathy. It turns out that the strength of empathy is determined by two factors: physical distance and personal connection.

The author and his colleague Jay Musen conducted an experiment to investigate this relationship more fully. Participants were instructed to envisage two scenarios.

In the first, subjects were asked to imagine vacationing in a country and experiencing a catastrophic typhoon. In the second, the subjects visualized having a friend there who gave them a live audio-visual feed of the aftermath. Of those who projected themselves as being physically on the scene, 68 percent said they were morally obliged to help, compared with just 34 percent of the live-feed group.

The same phenomenon can be witnessed in real-world scenarios. For example, in 1987, an 18-month-old girl fell down a well in Texas. She was trapped there for almost 60 hours. In support of the rescue effort, her family received more than \$700,000 from strangers. Happily, the toddler was rescued by emergency services.

But what's interesting is that the donated money could have saved the lives of thousands dying in developing countries. So why was it given for this cause only?

We feel a responsibility to help due to our feelings of anxiety and guilt but only if we feel a connection to the case. The girl down the well felt personal, even to faraway strangers.

When our ties to the event are weaker, we feel less compelled to act because we feel more distance, even if the disaster is larger in scale.

## **Moral Tribes Key Idea #6: Beliefs and values tend to be justified by rights and duties, but a pragmatic approach is more illuminating.**

One of the most contentious debates boiling in the world today revolves around abortion.

Generally speaking, pro-choice advocates and pro-lifers justify their points of view by looking at *rights* and *duties*.

Pro-choicers view abortion as a facet of women's *rights* – of course they should be able to make decisions about their bodies.

Equally, pro-lifers claim to oppose abortion due to their *duty* to protect all life.

These two arguments are therefore grounded in two completely different concepts. As a result, the only common ground they can debate is the question of when life actually begins.

Pro-life arguments focus on the potential of the human life that abortion terminates. For most pro-lifers, it's a *person's* life that begins at conception, the moment sperm and egg merge.

Pro-choicers, on the other hand, don't believe life begins at conception, but rather when a fetus has basic consciousness, meaning they have an awareness of their body and can feel pain. But focusing on when life begins does not actually answer the question of why exactly is or isn't early-term abortion *morally* justified?

In this case, utilitarianism can offer a pragmatic way to approach the debate.

Instead of worrying about when life begins, we should pose moral questions. For instance, would banning abortion impact society as a whole positively or negatively?

If abortions were outlawed, what would happen? Perhaps people would alter their sexual behavior, despite it being a satisfying part of life. Furthermore, some women might seek illegal abortions or go abroad for them, which could be dangerous. And finally, some women might give birth to babies whom they're not in a position to care for properly, either emotionally or financially.

Meanwhile, without abortions, more babies would be born. They could also experience happiness, thereby technically increasing overall happiness in the world. But then, by the same measure, should we not ban contraceptives and abstinence too, which also prevent babies from being born? In fact, would the moral imperative for adults be to pump out as many happy babies as possible? This seems like too harsh a demand.

One could also argue that the possibility of having abortions leads to an increase in harmful sex, for instance, between teenagers who are not yet ready for it. But it's not clear if banning abortions would actually reduce the amount of harmful sex, because presumably teenagers who are more mature and mindful of their choices are also the most likely to be sexually active.

Based on this reasoning, it seems that pro-choicers would have much stronger grounds for their perspective, as the possibility of legal abortion maximizes society's happiness at large.

Major debates like these continuously swirl around us, whether they're over abortion, laws, taxes, healthcare, capital punishment, marriage equality, gun control or immigration policies. A better understanding of moral psychology can help us make progress even in these challenging debates.

## **Final summary**

The key message in this book summary:

**Humanity's sense of morality is built on evolution and cultural experiences. We often respond to situations around us automatically, without really thinking them through. But when it comes to moral dilemmas, this won't lead to the best result. Prioritizing our own interests often leads to poorer outcomes than cooperating would and also results in the tragedy of the commons. This is why careful moral reasoning is necessary, especially when it comes to contentious, impactful topics.**

# 1 Solidarity in classic social theory

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The phenomenon of group loyalty and sharing resources existed long before the idea of solidarity developed. The core social units of precapitalist society were the family and the extended family. Ties of kinship were the basis for reciprocal loyalty, constituting specific duties and moral obligations. Moral norms required family members to help each other, remain together and defend each other against external threats and hazards. Outside the bounds of family in feudal society, peasants would help one another in the fields or when building houses. In some countries during the nineteenth century peasant solidarity developed a sophisticated cooperative movement that protected against the hazards of life and the growth of a market economy. Craftsmen established guilds that controlled the recruitment of apprentices, organised education and established security funds for their members (Christiansen 1997). Neighbours sometimes helped one another with food and money, when untimely death disrupted the household economy. Help with funeral expenses and looking after the neighbours' children, were not uncommon practices. The historian Knut Kjeldstadli has called the pre-working-class solidarity of the nineteenth century 'the community of ordinary people' (Kjeldstadli 1997). This involved an exchange of favours and services and reciprocal help between people. This behaviour was an everyday practice, the fulfilment of the widespread belief that 'if I help you then you will help me, if and when the need arises'.

The obligation to reciprocally assist one another existed in preindustrial societies and was based on common identity and a feeling of sameness with some, and of difference to others. These feelings were created by the cleavages of preindustrial society (Bartolini 2000). The cleavages followed cultural as well as functional lines of conflict, long before the class conflict was strong enough to predominate.

Historically speaking, the phenomenon of solidarity existed before the idea was formulated. The idea existed before the term became widespread, and the term was in general use before its modern meaning had developed. A Christian idea of *fraternity* was developed in the

early days of the Christian era, and was coined to identify and parallel the close relationships within the family to the development of community between Christian friars. A political idea of *fraternity* or *brotherhood* developed during the French revolution, and France was the birthplace of the *term* solidarity as well. In the first part of the nineteenth century, French social philosophers reflected upon the period of social and political unrest in the wake of the revolution. At the same time, they witnessed the early development of capitalism and the increasing influence of liberalism. These experiences prompted French social philosophers to find a way to combine the idea of individual rights and liberties with the idea of social cohesion and community. Here, the concept of solidarity was seen as a solution. The concept was a broad and inclusive one and it aimed at restoring the social integration that had been lost. In Germany, where Marxism became an early and dominating influence in the labour movement, the concept of solidarity developed later and was adapted to express the need for cohesion and unity in the working class and in the labour movement. This idea was more restricted, since it referred solely to workers, and more inclusive, since workers across national borders were included. It did not aim at integration and it implied conflict and divisiveness (class conflict) as well as unity. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Catholic social teaching inspired a third tradition of solidarity. Within Protestantism, the development of an idea of solidarity did not take place until after World War II.

In this and in Chapters 2 and 3, we will see how the idea of solidarity was developed in these three areas – classic sociology, socialist theory and Christian social ethics. The first objective is to trace the historical origins of the concept in social theory. The second is to map out how key contributors to classic sociology, the socialist tradition and to Christian ethics have configured the aspects of solidarity differently. In this way, different conceptions of solidarity will be explicated and used as a referential framework for the empirical study of the idea of solidarity in political parties in succeeding chapters.

### **Prelude: from fraternity to Charles Fourier and Pierre Leroux**

If there is a precursor for the term solidarity, it is the concept of *fraternity* or *brotherhood*, which points to the close relations and the feelings of belonging that exist within the family and extends this understanding to other voluntary associations and groupings. The history of this concept begins when a relationship between people outside the family is referred to by analogy as a relationship between brothers. According to

the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, the concept of fraternity was occasionally used in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, but played a more significant role in the early Christian era. The Christian idea of brotherhood was a constitutive one for communities of friars. In the Middle Ages, the Christian idea of brotherhood was applied to the more mundane and profane relationships between men of the same profession, such as merchants, artisans and apprentices. In this way, the concept developed and changed, referring to the community and the cohesion of a social group. To a great extent, the concept lost its religious connotations (Brunner, Conze and Koselleck 1972). During the Enlightenment, the continuing process of secularisation further contributed to this development.

French lawyers already applied the term *solidarité* in the sixteenth century, referring to a common responsibility for debts incurred by one of the members of a group (Hayward 1959). The term was included in Napoleon's famous legal code, the *Code Civil*, in 1804. The transformation of the legal concept of solidarity into a political concept seems to have begun in the latter half of the eighteenth century. French historians of language have noted that revolutionary leaders, such as Mirabeau and Danton, occasionally used the term solidarity with a meaning that transcended the legal concept (Zoll 2000). During the revolution of 1789 the Jacobins made *fraternité* a key concept together with *freedom* and *equality*. Feelings of brotherhood were to be a means of realising equality, and the Jacobins established *societies of brotherhood* among revolutionaries to achieve the goals of the revolution. Fraternity or brotherhood came to denote a feeling of political community and the wish to emphasise what was held in common. Occupational differences and differences in the financial status of revolutionaries were downplayed, and the concept was part of the practical programme implemented to change society and its institutions. Brotherhood had now become a political concept that was close in its meaning to the concept of solidarity that would develop in the nineteenth century and become hegemonic in the twentieth century.

Andreas Wildt argues that the concept of solidarity was not politicised until the 1840s (Wildt 1998). He does not, however, concretise the criteria for what he would call a political concept. If *politics* means activities to influence the decisions of the state or activities of the state, we may discern a political concept of solidarity in Charles Fourier's *Theorie de l'Unité*. Charles Fourier (1772–1837) is often considered a forerunner of socialism. In 1821, he published this voluminous work in which he describes a utopia – *The Phalanx* – consisting of 1500 to 1600 people living and working together in harmony in common households (Fourier 1822a)

and (Fourier 1822b). Here, *solidarity* is used in four different ways. First, there is the principle of insurance, the legacy of the *Code Napoleon* concerning the common responsibility of a group of people for insurance and the repayment of debt. Second, there is the preparedness to share resources with people in need. Third, there is the more general application to describe a feeling of community – *solidarités sociaux* and *solidarités collectives*. Fourth, there is Fourier's argument for the introduction of a guaranteed minimum income and for family support. He used *solidarity* to refer to public support for families and male providers in need – *la garantie familiale solidaire* (Fourier 1822b). The second and third ways of using the term *solidarity* are similar to the ways in which the concept is used today. These meanings were included in the meaning *solidarity* came to have in the Marxist and socialist tradition in the next hundred years. The fourth meaning has clear political implications and is close to the association between solidarity and the welfare state that is found today.

Fourier recognised the tension between collective organisation and individual freedom, but assured his readers that his harmonious utopia would allow for individual freedom because its members would own property and stock, and would use this ownership as a basis for the freedom of choice. In other words, class differences would still exist. Contrary to the commonly held assertion, one might argue that Fourier's ideas do not qualify him to be seen as a forerunner of socialism. What did inspire socialists later on were Fourier's fierce attacks upon competition, commerce, family life and capitalist civilisation.<sup>1</sup>

We might say, with Skinner, that the illocutionary force of Fourier's concept of solidarity was not strong. The concept was applied casually, it was not well defined or thoroughly discussed, and it disappeared from his later texts (Liedman 1999). Fourier's compatriot, the typographer, philosopher and economist, Pierre Leroux (1797–1871) was the first to elaborate on the concept of solidarity in a systematic way when he published *De l'Humanité*, in 1840 (Leroux 1985 (1840)).<sup>2</sup> Leroux was a pre-Marxian communist, and he later claimed – in *La Grève de Samarez* (1859) – that he was the first to introduce the concept of solidarity and the concept of socialism in philosophy (Leroux 1979 [1859]).

<sup>1</sup> For an early critique see Gide (1901). As a whole, the very extensive writing of Fourier is characterised by a strange combination of acute observations, peculiar speculations and detailed fantasies about society and his own prescriptions for utopia, i.e. detailed architecture and equipment in the rooms of the *Phalanx* (Fourier 1876).

<sup>2</sup> Leroux was elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1848 and later reelected to the Legislative Assembly. For a presentation of Leroux, see Peignot (1988).

This may be true, but only if we accept the idea that Fourier had not contributed to philosophy some years before, which is a matter of some controversy. There is no doubting that Leroux made an important contribution to the transforming of the legal concept of solidarity into a social concept.

Leroux's point of departure was his criticism of three other positions – Christian charity, the idea of a social contract as a foundation for society, and the conception of society as an organism. He criticised Christian charity for being unable to reconcile self-love with the love of others, and for considering the love of others an obligation, and not the result of a genuine interest in community with others (Leroux 1985 (1840)). Besides that, equality played no role in Christian charity, he complained. He wanted to supplant the concept of charity with the concept of solidarity, arguing that the idea of solidarity would be a more able one in the struggle for a justly organised society. He rejected Hobbes' and Rousseau's idea of a social contract, and saw the social contract as a misconceived notion because it presupposed an atomised view of the individual. Finally, he denounced the organic conception of society because he feared that this way of understanding social life would result in authoritarianism (Le Bras-Chopard 1992).<sup>3</sup>

Leroux conceived solidarity primarily as a relationship. Society was nothing but the relationships between the human beings that constitute a people. Socialism, Leroux wrote, is the organisation of greater and greater solidarity in society. Leroux's concept of solidarity was more social than political, and he did not believe that solidarity should constitute any rights for citizens, or that it should intend to influence the decisions or the activities of the state – (cf. also Wildt 1998). These two pre-Marxian concepts of solidarity are summarised in Table 1.1.

Compared to Fourier, Leroux brought the discussion of solidarity closer to the ideas developed in the classic works of sociology. Whereas Fourier's concept was very restricted and limited to his proposed utopia, the *Phalanx*, Leroux broadened the foundation and the inclusiveness of the idea of solidarity. At the same time, he tried to balance his position between an atomised view of the individual, in liberalism, and the authoritarian potential of the idea of society as an organism.

<sup>3</sup> Leroux understood society as based upon the triad of family, property and homeland. The problem for him was that the relationships between the three were not well organised. The family was based on the authority of the father, and property was based on man himself being a property. Thus, property served to oppress the proletariat. He argued for reforms and hoped that the bourgeoisie could be persuaded to implement peaceful changes. In this respect, Leroux's ideas, like those of Fourier, had a certain utopian flavour.

Table 1.1 *Fourier's and Leroux's conception of solidarity*

	Foundation	Objective	Inclusiveness	Collective orientation
Fourier	The household/ the <i>Phalanx</i>	Harmony	Very restricted (members of the <i>Phalanx</i> )	Medium: personal autonomy is preserved through private property
Leroux	Similarity Identification with others	Improved social relationships	Broad: the entire society	Medium: not made into a theme, but there is a general criticism of authoritarianism

A follower of Fourier, Hippolyte Renaud, brought the political idea of solidarity to broader public attention in 1842 with the pamphlet *Solidarité*. It was a very popular item and was reprinted several times (Wildt 1998; Liedman 1999). Although we might say that the immediate perlocutionary effect was strong, this concept of solidarity was naïve and based upon the world-wide diffusion of Fourier's idea of a *Phalanx*, with people living in harmony and happiness.

During the 1840s, the term solidarity spread to Germany and England. It was adopted and developed by socialists in the upheaval in France in 1848. After this revolution the term was definitely accepted as a political concept, even if the end of the Second Republic in 1852 relegated the concept to obscurity again for some years. It did not reemerge again as an important concept until Leon Bourgeois and the middle-class *solidarists* revived it in the 1880s, often with reference to the ideas of Leroux (Le Bras-Chopard 1992).

### **Comte: time, continuity and interdependence**

Concern about the idea of solidarity was part of a wider discourse concerning the constitution of social order and society. This preoccupation with social order must be understood in light of the development of capitalism in Western Europe in the nineteenth century. Modern capitalism had disruptive effects upon local communities and family ties. Rapid urbanisation, the crisis within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the growth of anti-Semitism were inducements for sociologists to be particularly concerned about social order and social integration (Turner and Rojek 2001). The fragility of the phenomenon of solidarity was part of the general concern about the conditions of society and the precariousness of social integration. Although Fourier and Leroux had introduced the concept of solidarity in the first decades of the nineteenth century, it

was the father of positivism, Auguste Comte, who brought the concept of solidarity into sociology.

In his book *Système de politique positive* published in 1852, Auguste Comte opposed the increasing influence of individualist conceptions of economy and production and the accompanying *laissez-faire* ideology in the first part of the nineteenth century (Comte 1973 (1852)). His ambition was to formulate a ‘religion of humanity’<sup>4</sup> that would create an altruistic system of discipline that would be able to tame egoistic instincts. The individual personality was not to be sacrificed, only subordinated to the social concerns that would promote social advancement.

Comte was preoccupied with the integrative mechanisms of society. The first is embodied in the different roles taken by women. According to Comte, there are three kinds of social functions in society – reflection or intellectual activities, moral affections and practical activities. Different groups fulfil these functions. The main provider of reflection is the priesthood, whereas women are the main providers of affection, and practical leaders of activity. The problem is that these groups focus in an unbalanced way on intellect, affection and practical achievements in life. The priesthood tends to underestimate feelings, while women tend to exaggerate their importance. This creates serious inconvenience and disturbs the general harmony of society. Women’s integrative function is found in their three different roles as mother, wife and daughter. These are, at the same time, three different modes of solidarity: *obedience*, *union* and *protection* – corresponding to the three forms of altruistic instinct, *veneration*, *attachment* and *benevolence* (Comte 1973 (1852)).

The second integrative mechanism is *continuity*, according to Comte. The special mark of human society is the faculty of cooperation between generations. Human society is characterised by subjective bonds and the continuity between generations. Humanity accumulates and capitalises upon the resources of previous generations, and man is fundamentally a being that is conditioned by *time*. Time makes possible the transmission of collective experiences and resources, and this ability of humankind distinguishes it from all other forms of life. Man is not simply an economic being determined by the material aspect of the social structure. In the long run, culture imprints itself on the collective and contributes to improving the human condition, Comte argued.

The idea of solidarity is included together with his concept of continuity. Solidarity follows from continuity and is an important factor in social

<sup>4</sup> Comte defined *religion* as a state of complete harmony peculiar to human life – a state when all parts of human life were ordered in their natural relation to one another and where reason and emotion were balanced and integrated.

life. ‘Continuity, not Solidarity, is the great moving force of man’s destinies, especially in our modern times’, wrote Comte (1973 (1852)). Our interdependence in the past develops bonds that make us more interdependent in our present social organisation. We are dependent upon the past for its accumulation of experiences and resources, and we are dependent upon others in our own day for the production of goods and services. Because wealth is created by the effort of many, the individual is not free to use his wealth as he pleases. Wealth is always entrusted to someone tacitly for a social purpose. Comte directed attention to two aspects of the division of labour. On the one hand, he saw the division of labour as an expression of human solidarity. On the other hand, in the new industrial society that was developing the division of labour was also a source of disorganisation. It could not be considered the foundation of the unity between human beings (Cingolani 1992). These were aspects of the division of labour that Durkheim would elaborate on fifty years later.

The third integrative mechanism for Comte was *the religion of humanity* – a common set of values and ideas. Only this could produce personal unity and integrate reason and feeling within each individual, and create social unity between individuals. Affection based upon reflection unites men universally in the same feelings and in the same beliefs, and in this way restores harmony in society.

Comte’s criticism of the *homo economicus* in *laissez-faire* ideology did not lead him to collectivism or communism, which he thought ignored both natural and affective differences. Thus, Comte’s positivism represented a third alternative between utopian liberalism and utopian communism. In hindsight, his theories about the location of the affections, reason and practical ability, about the belief in the homogenising effect of reason and intellect, and his ambition to create a harmonious society without contradictions or conflicts, are easily dismissed. But his emphasis upon interdependence and upon our debts to previous generations are ideas that were built upon in the decades to come.

Leon Bourgeois further developed Comte’s theories about the *debt* owed to previous generations (see Chapter 4). Theories about interdependence were formulated in the social ethics of German Catholicism, and later made explicit in papal encyclicals from the latter part of the nineteenth century. In Germany in 1887, Ferdinand Tönnies developed his famous ideal types, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* or the distinction between community and society (Tönnies 1957). According to Tönnies, the development of capitalism made community weaker so that it gradually was replaced by *society*. Traditional social ties and personal relationships were weakened and economic rationality and a means–end orientation replaced cooperation and feelings of community.

Although *the term* solidarity is not always used, other classic sociologists such as Simmel, Durkheim, and Weber were concerned about the fragility of this phenomenon. Living at a time when liberalism was triumphant, they searched for mechanisms that would constitute social order and an integrated society. Simmel captured this search in the formulation of the title of his famous essay, *How Is Society Possible?* There were, of course, different proposals in answer to this challenge. Some noted the role of religion as the social cement of traditional society. Others found that solidarity should be considered the social fundament, and that solidarity was a prerequisite for the survival of society (Juul 1997).

### **Durkheim: social norms and shared values**

The most famous and probably the most cited work in classic sociology on solidarity is Emile Durkheim's *The Division of Labour in Society*, published in 1893. Being part of the French tradition from Leroux and Comte, Durkheim's work represented a continuing dialogue with, and critique of liberalism, and the theory of a social contract in the writings of Hobbes, Locke, Spencer and others. Hobbes' view of *force* as an integrative mechanism in society did not pass unnoticed. The dissolution of traditions and social bonds that he observed in his own day persuaded him to formulate the basic question of sociology: *What holds society together?* His answer was that society was not a product of rational calculation, self-interest or social contract. Relationships based upon self-interest are the least stable of all. 'Today it is useful for me to unite with you, and tomorrow the same reason will make me your enemy', he said (Durkheim 1984 (1893)). Society is based upon social norms, shared values and rituals, and solidarity is one of the normative mechanisms that integrate members of society, he insisted.

Durkheim distinguished between two forms of solidarity, *mechanical* solidarity in a traditional society, and *organic* solidarity in a modern society. Mechanical solidarity develops in a simple and homogeneous society with a low degree of differentiation. People are linked together by their *sameness* in living conditions, life-styles, common culture and beliefs and by religion and rituals. According to Durkheim, all human beings have two kinds of consciousness, an individual consciousness that is characteristic of the person, and a common consciousness shared with all other members of society. In a traditional society, the latter form of consciousness is dominant within each individual. Durkheim's concept of mechanical solidarity integrates a material and a subjective element. Solidarity is strong in traditional society, because people *are* alike and because they *think* alike.

Contrary to traditional society, modern society is characterised by a high degree of occupational specialisation and social differentiation. According to Durkheim, citizens are not tied together by tradition and inherited social norms but by their interdependence created by the increased division of labour and specialisation. Modern society produces great differences in living conditions, culture and ideology. The increased division of labour reduces the space available for common consciousness, and individual consciousness becomes more dominant. *Organic* solidarity refers to the factual interdependence in modern society where occupational differences create a complex interdependence between the activities of different producers.

Durkheim is somewhat unclear about the relationship between mechanical solidarity in traditional society and organic solidarity in modern society. In some of his writings, he argues that the first simply disappears as a consequence of the increasing division of labour. At other times, when he argues in more detail, he maintains that the two forms of solidarity are, in fact, facets of the same social reality. Our common consciousness continues to exist in modern society, but it is a reduced entity. The advance of our individual consciousness has had this effect.

What worried Durkheim was that the process of weakening mechanical solidarity might leave a moral vacuum that would not automatically be filled. When mechanical solidarity is reduced, social life will suffer if a new form of solidarity does not take its place. Social progress does not consist of the dissolution of social life, but rather, on the increasing unity in society, and the only mechanism that can produce this is the division of labour, he argued. Because the increasing division of labour increases interdependence and the need for interaction and collaboration, law and morality will develop too. Human consciousness and morality are shaped by the influence of others in the group in which we take part. Law and morality represent the bonds that bind individuals to one another and to society. Morality is the source of solidarity, and morality is 'everything that forces man to take account of other people, to regulate his action by something other than the prompting of his own egoism . . .' (Durkheim 1984 (1893)).

Durkheim believed that the new organic solidarity of modern society would develop only if certain conditions were met. The division of labour would only produce solidarity if it were allowed to develop spontaneously. For Durkheim, this meant that all that prevented the free development of individual talents and abilities must be altered. The distribution of social functions should correspond to the distribution of natural abilities, and no obstacle should prevent an individual from obtaining a position commensurate with his talents. Thus, the established order had to be

changed so that the lower classes gained access to new functions in society. This was a question of justice for Durkheim. 'Justice is the necessary accompaniment to every kind of solidarity', he said – a formulation that Habermas would repeat one hundred years later (see Chapter 9). Grave social inequities would compromise solidarity. Modern society strives to reduce inequality as much as possible by helping in various ways those who are in a difficult situation. The equality between citizens is becoming ever greater and this development should continue, he argued.

Durkheim's pioneering contributions reflecting upon the concept of solidarity brought to light a range of themes and issues that continue to be discussed in social theory: the relationship between similarity and difference, and the relationship between solidarity, justice and equality, the law as an integrating force, the phenomenon of increasing individualism, and the loosening ties within the family, in other groups, and in the traditions of the local community. All of these issues have been made subjects of discussion for social theorists including Habermas, Luhmann, Giddens and others. Some elements of his theories are close to the social democratic concept of solidarity that Bernstein formulated and that came to be reflected in social democratic party programmes in the twentieth century.

Table 1.2 summarises the two conceptions of Durkheimian solidarity. Social interaction, in a broad sense, is a necessary precondition for both of Durkheim's concepts of solidarity. Social interaction refers here to social relationships and ties that bind individuals to groups, organisations and ultimately to society itself. The number and the intensity of these ties are important and variable characteristics of social interaction. They will determine how inclusive or how exclusive solidarity in society will be. Durkheim observed an inverted relation between the degree of solidarity and the degree of openness towards foreigners. 'The weaker solidarity is, that is, the slacker the thread that links society together, the easier it must be for foreign elements to be incorporated into societies' (Durkheim 1984 (1893)).

Durkheim 1 and Durkheim 2 differ in terms of two of the aspects emphasised here – the foundation of solidarity and how these forms of solidarity encompass the relationship between the collective and the individual. In a society dominated by mechanical solidarity, common consciousness 'envelops our total consciousness, coinciding with it at every point. At that moment our individuality is zero. In such a society, the individual does not belong to himself – he is literally a thing belonging to society' (Durkheim 1984 (1893)). Durkheim 2 – organic solidarity – entails a more complicated relationship between the collective and individual freedom. In modern society individuals are at once more autonomous and

Table 1.2 *Durkheim's mechanical and organic conceptions of solidarity*

	Foundation	Objective/ function	Inclusiveness	Collective orientation
Durkheim 1/ Mechanical solidarity characterises traditional society	Social interaction, homogeneity, social norms, shared values, rituals, and common consciousness	Social integration	All who are alike (this can be understood broadly or narrowly)	Medium/strong: common consciousness dominates individuality
Durkheim 2/ Organic solidarity characterises modern society	Social interaction, social norms, interdependence is a consequence of the division of labour, and complementary diversity characterises society	Social integration	Varying: dependent on the number and intensity of ties that link the individual to groups, organisations, and ultimately to society	Medium/weak: the dilemma is acknowledged, accepted and discussed Defence of liberal democracy

more mutually interdependent. The ever-increasing division of labour transforms social solidarity and creates the conditions for the individual's greater freedom and greater dependence upon others.<sup>5</sup>

Durkheim did not return to the distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity (Crow 2002). He continued, however, to be preoccupied with two issues that are of interest here – how shared beliefs unify society and the relationship between solidarity and individualism. He continuously insisted that common interests were not sufficient to sustain cohesion in a social group, and that a common moral code was also necessary. Emotions reinforce the commitment to solidarity, and the more intense social relationships are, the stronger the sentiments of solidarity. What he called *moral individualism* was necessary to counteract the destructive effects of egoistic individualism. This presupposes the fact that people are sufficiently aware of their interdependence and their mutual obligations in complex modern societies. This understanding would reinforce solidarity in society. He continued to worry about the dangers of egoistic individualism. He sought different ways to bond the individual to society, but he was afraid that the bonds he observed were not strong enough to restrain egoism (Seigel 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Durkheim seems to postulate this relation, as he maintains that 'there exists a social solidarity arising from the division of labour. This is a self-evident truth, since in them [modern societies] the division of labour is highly developed and engenders solidarity' (Durkheim 1984 (1893)).

### Max Weber: solidarity in social relations

Max Weber formulated a view of solidarity that differed from the group-oriented and integrative conception of Durkheim in two respects. First, whereas the tradition of Comte and Durkheim was mainly preoccupied with solidarity as a macro phenomenon binding society together, Weber was more inclined to conceive solidarity as a phenomenon at the micro level (Oorschot and Komter 1998). Solidarity was a special type of social relationship. In this respect, he picked up the thread from Leroux. Second, Weber saw solidarity as arising from the pursuit of economic advantage and honour. Thus, solidarity did not only integrate, but was divisive as well (Bendix 1960). Here, as in other respects, Weber's contributions are a result of the closer dialogue with his compatriot, Marx, than with the French tradition from Comte to Durkheim.

Weber's concept of solidarity follows from his key ideas; *social action*, *social relationship* and *social class*. For Weber, action is social when the individual gives it a subjective meaning that takes account of the behaviour of others and lets this orient his own course of action (Weber 1978 (1922)). Social relationships develop when many actors take into account the actions of others. A relationship is symmetrical when each actor gives it the same meaning. However, complete symmetry, Weber maintained, is rare. Generally, the parts of a social relationship orient their actions on a rational basis (*zweckrational – goal-oriented*), but in part they are also motivated by their values and sense of duty. Weber's exposition here is not explicitly about solidarity, but we may deduce that in a social relationship based on solidarity we will find varying degrees of identical reciprocal expectations and a mixture of instrumental and normative elements.

Although we find the term *solidarity* only sporadically in Weber's text, *Economy and Society*, the idea of solidarity is integrated in his discussion about the relationship between *Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung*. *Vergesellschaftung* refers to actions based upon considerations of material advantage or utility, irrespective of personal or social considerations. He contrasts this with actions that are invoked by a sense of solidarity with others. Thus, *Vergemeinschaftung* represents communal actions based upon a sense of community, including those that are shared by family members, friends, professional colleagues or other social groups with an internal code of conduct (Oorschot and Komter 1998). As a general rule, Weber maintains, a communal relationship based upon *Vergemeinschaftung* is associated with another based upon *Vergesellschaftung*. Most often, elements of both types of action are interwoven, as all individuals are engaged in the pursuit of both ideal and material interests. Parents

Table 1.3 *Weber's conception of solidarity*

Foundation	Objective	Inclusiveness	Collective orientation
Interests and honour Norms and duties	Realise interests and increase power	Restricted: social groups or professions	Medium? Not explicitly formulated, acceptance of dilemma

look to the economic aspects of the marriage of their children, and even businessmen develop a sense of ethical conduct in their commercial relationships. The feeling of being part of a 'we' characterises the experience of solidarity. For Weber, every 'we' presupposes a 'they', those others who are excluded from the group or community.

In his analysis of social status and social stratification, Weber describes how social groups combine honour and the monopoly over ideal and material goods and opportunities, to distance themselves from others. The feeling of belonging together is always associated with the exclusion of others. All social actions that defend or preserve status differences are based upon the feeling of belonging together, he maintained. Weber did not apply the term solidarity to discuss how workers developed into a class, but his analysis of the development of class-consciousness almost implies class solidarity. Class-consciousness succeeds most easily when the following conditions are met: (1) when a group is able to identify immediate opponents (workers against entrepreneurs, but not against stockholders); (2) when large numbers of people are in the same situation; (3) when they are concentrated and easier to organise; (4) when a group has goals that are easy to identify, to identify with, and to understand, and when there are others, outside of their class (the intelligentsia) who are able to formulate and interpret these goals. This way of reasoning echoes that of Marx and Lenin.

Because solidarity is constituted by a mixture in the elements of community and society that bind people together (*Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung*), and because this mixture has to be studied empirically, Weber's idea of solidarity may be broadly inclusive or narrowly limited. The mixture of the two may vary from group to group and from time to time, he wrote. Because his concept of solidarity applies to social relationships in general, it may be applied in more contexts than the concept of solidarity in the Marxist tradition, as will be made clear in Chapter 2.

Weber wanted to distinguish between two kinds of social relationships – the one that is governed by reciprocal expectations, and the other that is maintained by the exercise of authority. The latter implies the acceptance of a legitimate order and the rights of certain individuals within that

legitimate order to exercise power. In Weber's view, it is possible to understand the workings of a society by making an analysis of the conditions that promote the solidarity that is based upon legitimate authority and the solidarity that is based upon reciprocal expectation. Weber's concern with authority, and with power and domination are further reasons for placing his ideas closer to those formulated by Marx than to those that were formulated by Durkheim.

### **The discourse in the development of social theory in the early days of sociology**

The different ideas of solidarity in classic social theory are summarised in Table 1.4. As we have seen, Fourier, Leroux, Comte and Durkheim primarily understood the idea of solidarity as a means of restoring harmony and social integration in society. All of these thinkers were writing in a society that was still trying to come to terms with its own most recent history, with the violence and the terror of the revolution and with the reversal of fortunes that transformed that revolution into the rise and fall of Napoleon's empire. The need for a stable order, for harmony and social integration, was felt everywhere, and this mood is tacitly reflected in this early French discourse. Certainly, another answer must be added to this first. The emergence of capitalism, and the problems associated with the early phases of capitalism impelled these thinkers to find ameliorative solutions, without raising the spectre of yet another social revolt or upheaval.

Of course, their understandings of the idea of solidarity do vary, and their discourse is a complex and detailed elaboration of their differences and similarities. Their discourse seems to underscore the need to have a broadly inclusive understanding of solidarity, to include and encompass all essential parts of society in the great social task that is embodied in their common goal, the promotion of a harmonious society. The most important distinctions, in a discussion of the idea of solidarity, are to be found in the mechanical and organic forms of solidarity in the writings of Durkheim.

All of these French writers are deeply concerned about the dilemma found in the relationship between individual freedom and in the collective requirements of solidarity that are imposed by groups, organisations, communities and societies. They all recognise that the strong social ties integrating the individual to the group will conflict with a high degree of individualism, but none of them argue that personal freedom should be abandoned. The concern about this relationship exists throughout the French discourse, but it is most clearly expressed in the texts of

Table 1.4 *Conceptions of solidarity in classic sociology*

	Foundation	Objective/function	Inclusiveness	Collective orientation
Fourier	The household/the <i>Phalanx</i>	Harmony	Very restricted	Medium: personal autonomy preserved through private property
Leroux	Similarity Identification with others	Improved social relationships	Broad: the whole society	Medium: not made a theme, but a general criticism of authoritarianism
Comte	Time and continuity Interdependence	Social harmony Integration	Broad: all	Medium: acceptance of the dilemma/subordinate but do not sacrifice individual freedom
Durkheim 1 (traditional society)	Homogeneity Social norms, shared values, rituals Common consciousness	Social integration	Broad: all	Medium
Durkheim 2 (modern society)	Interdependence is a consequence of the division of labour	Social integration	Broad: all	Medium: the dilemma is accepted and discussed
Weber	Interests and honour Norms and duties	Realise interests and increase power	Restricted: social groups or professions	Medium Not explicitly formulated Acceptance of the dilemma

Durkheim. It may be argued that the French discourse has an element of nostalgia, a tendency to look back at the past and to idealise conditions existing before the revolution of 1789, to a society that had all but disappeared. In particular, Comte and Durkheim have elements of this backward-looking view in their discussions of solidarity. But their conceptions were relevant in their own day and Durkheim's writings also look to the future. However, neither of these two had the strong future orientation that was to characterise the concept of solidarity in the labour movement.

Weber's idea of solidarity represents a different approach. Whereas Comte's and Durkheim's ideas of solidarity are located in a prepolitical tradition, Weber's concept is closer to a political idea of solidarity. He locates the basis for solidarity in the interests, norms and duties of *groups* that want to realise their interests. He was not a revolutionary and his own writings do not directly engage the Marxists of his day, but Marxist thinking did have its effects upon his own thinking. His writings about solidarity diverge from the French discourse and are closer to the Marxist tradition that will be discussed in Chapter 2.