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Regimes of Social Cohesion: Societies and the Crisis of Globalisation

Andy Green and Jan Germen Janmaat

Chapter Two

Western Intellectual Traditions of Social Cohesion

Contemporary writing on social cohesion – both from policy-makers and academics – suffers from a considerable intellectual amnesia. Mention is rarely made of the historical precursors of modern concepts of social cohesion, except in the occasional passing reference to the works of Durkheim, and it would be easy to conclude from reading these accounts that social cohesion is essentially a contemporary issue. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. The problem of social order has deep roots in political philosophy, going back to the ancients. It was also the central concern of the new discipline of sociology which grew up in the nineteenth-century Europe, in writings stretching from August Comte and Henri Saint-Simon through to Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, and Ferdinand Tönnies. Social cohesion, or in French terminology, *social solidarity*, were the key concepts in endless theoretical debates throughout the century, as social thinkers sought to understand what social forces and institutions might hold newly industrialized societies together in the absence of the traditional sources of moral authority, which had been weakened by industrial and political revolutions. It was the sociologists, and particularly those in the French positivist tradition stemming from

Comte, who most explicitly addressed the issue, and gave us the terms we now use to conceptualize the phenomenon.

However, theirs was not the only tradition where the question loomed large. In fact, French positivist writing on solidarity was in large measure a reaction against the way that British liberal philosophy and political economy thought about society and the place of the individual within it. And although it was less explicit here, this liberal tradition in fact contained within it an implicit theory of social cohesion. By the same token, the third main strand of nineteenth-century writings on the social order – that within the German ‘romantic conservative’ tradition – was an explicit reaction against French rationalism and positivism, and provided a quite different account of what it was that held societies together (Greenfield, 2003a). These three traditions – and the social democratic tradition which evolved later out of republican and socialist thought – each provide a highly elaborated theoretical account of the nature of social cohesion, its preconditions and the forces which can undermine it. It is worth revisiting these traditions, not only because they contain all the key elements and debates found in the modern discourses, but also because their elaborated accounts, which were refined through constant argument between the traditions, show very clearly the distinctive sets of interlocking propositions which still underpin the less theorized discourses which exist today. We may start with liberal thought because it was this that started the chain of intellectual reactions which led from John Locke in the late seventeenth century to Tönnies at the end of the nineteenth.

Liberalism

All liberal thought, from John Locke down to Herbert Spencer, can be said to derive from a set of fundamental and interconnected propositions about the nature of the individual and of individual freedoms; the relations of the individual to the state; and the ordering of civil society, the layer of social life between the individual and the state. In the first two areas, we find the

propositions which define what social cohesion cannot be. In the last, we find the arguments about where social cohesion can reside. In liberal thought, the individual is taken to precede society and to be endowed with certain natural freedoms or rights and it is the role of the state to protect these freedoms and rights. But individual liberty is held to be in constant danger from the state, which has a natural tendency towards tyranny, and the state must therefore be contained to a minimal role, as far as is consistent with protecting these individual freedoms. To put the case at its crudest, beyond the defense of the realm and maintenance of law and order, the state is not required to vouchsafe social cohesion, since it issues spontaneously from the natural harmony of interests in civil society, which must remain as free from state interference as possible.

The main tenets of modern liberal thought derive from the British philosopher John Locke, whose major works appeared after the 1688 ‘Glorious Revolution’, which he supported. Locke believed that individuals are born into a state of nature which he called a ‘state of perfect freedom’ (Locke, 1963). They are endowed with reason and enjoy natural rights as human beings, not least to own property and to enjoy the fruits of their labour. As he famously argues, it is labour which gives the right to property:

Though the earth, and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has property in his own person. This no body has any right to but himself. The labor of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of a state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joyned to it something of his own, and thereby makes it his property. (Locke, 1963: 305).

It was the right to property that underpinned Locke’s theory of government, which argued for constitutional monarchy and governments elected through a limited franchise based on property ownership. The role of the state was to protect property, uphold law and order, defend the realm and safeguard the rights and liberties of citizens. Beyond this, the prerogatives of the state should be kept to a minimum. Unlike his philosophical predecessor, Hobbes, Locke

was an optimist and saw no need for a mighty Leviathan state because men had a natural identity of interests borne of their desire to exchange goods in the marketplace, where he assumed there was natural equality in exchange relations. Although he does not use the term, it is this argument about civil society which lays the foundation for later liberal thinking about social cohesion. It was also the basis for his famous defense of religious and political toleration, without which man could not enjoy his natural freedoms.

The liberal tradition of British Political Economy continues from where Locke left off, extending his philosophical principles into the sphere of market economics. Its fundamental argument about the natural harmony of interests in civil society remains the basis of its conception of social cohesion. Adam Smith, writing a century later, was, like Locke, an advocate of individual freedoms and minimum state intervention. Arguing for free trade against the prevailing mercantilist notions of state intervention in the economy, Smith proclaimed the fundamental beneficence of the 'natural' market order. According to the theory of the 'free market', it was the pursuit of individual self-interest, unfettered by government restriction, which would lead to the mutual benefit of all and the maximum public good. The market order had multiple advantages. It allowed the greatest degree of individual liberty; it provided incentives to enterprise, a competitive spur to efficiency and guaranteed success to the most meretricious; and by encouraging the pursuit of individual self-interest, it inadvertently promoted the good of the whole community. By pursuing his self-interest, Smith famously wrote, a man is 'led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention' – the common weal. The necessary corollary of the free market was limitation of government power. Smith supported certain limited state interventions where incentives for individuals in the market were not sufficient to ensure the achievement of certain key public goods, such as education. The latter was, he believed, particularly important to offset the deleterious effects of routinized factory labour on the intelligence and morals of the growing army of factory

workers. Nevertheless, there was, according to Smith, ‘a strong presumption against government activity beyond the fundamental duties of protection against foreign foes and the maintenance of justice’ (Smith, 1904: 611).

While Locke had made the original *a priori* liberal case for the defense of the individual against the state, it was Adam Smith who provided the blueprint for the liberal theory of social order through his detailed anatomization of the workings of the market. The subsequent giants of nineteenth-century liberal thought, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, adapted the ideas for the somewhat more democratic times in which they lived, but added little in essence to the case for the natural harmony of interests that was the basis of the theory of social order. Both placed the individual before the state as Locke and Smith had done. Like Smith, but going somewhat further, they found increasing causes why the state should intervene in specific areas of social life, such as education and urban sanitation. However, they remained fundamentally *laissez-faire* in their attitudes on the optimum relations between state and civil society. ‘Nothing ought to be done,’ wrote Bentham, ‘or attempted by Government for the purpose of causing any augmentation in the national mass of wealth ... without some special reason. Be quiet ought to be the motto or watchword of Government.’ (Bentham quoted in Taylor, 1972: 34). John Stuart Mill had growing reservations about pure *laissez-faire* towards the end of his life, but was still publicly opposed to any but the most cautious state interventions and only then for exceptional reasons. In 1848, he still thought ‘letting alone ... should be the general practice’ (Mill quoted in Perkin, 1985: 322). He came to support the provision of public schooling, provided that competition remained between private and public schools, but opposed compulsory attendance in favour of legislation to require qualifications for entry into skilled occupations. But in most other matters he remained resolutely for the liberties of the individual against the state. The only justification for state restraints on liberty was the protection of individual freedoms which he defined, in the famous negative manner, as the right

for the individual to do as he pleases so long as he does not infringe the freedoms of others. As he wrote: 'every departure from the laissez-faire principal, unless required by some great good, is a certain evil' (Mill quoted in Fraser, 1985: 47).

The clearest hallmark of liberal thought, from John Locke, down to John Stuart Mill, has been the absolute priority accorded to the individual over the state and society. In principle, the individual is seen to precede society and society is often portrayed as little more than the multiple interactions between individuals freely pursuing their interests in the market. Society, in its collective sense, is regarded with some suspicion. For Adam Smith, even the clubbing together of individuals in associations could be an offence to liberty. 'People of the same trade,' he wrote, 'seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices.' (Smith, 1904: 1, X, 82). Nor is the individual seen as constituted by society or by culture. Bentham famously said that the community was a 'fictitious body', just as the Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was later to declare that 'there is no such thing as society – only individuals and their families.'¹ In his utilitarian system, the starting point is the universal propensity of individuals to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. The role of government in this 'felicific calculus' was to ensure the 'greatest happiness to the greatest number.' But Bentham had no interest in defining happiness other than on the pleasure principle. Individual wants are a private matter and, so far as Bentham was concerned, are formulated privately. There is no sense in Bentham that individual preferences might be shaped by culture and society. Mill referred to the utilitarian system, which came to provide what many would consider to be the somewhat simplistic socio-psychological basis of some modern classical economics, as cold and mechanical, based on a naive psychology and suited only to 'regulating the merely business part of social arrangements' (Mill, 1985: 105). But the criticism could be extended to much of the liberal

¹ Margaret Thatcher's famous comment was made in her appearance on BBC Radio's *Woman's Hour*.

thought of the period. It is largely culture-free, or 'philistine' as Matthew Arnold was later to lament (Arnold, 1932).

Given the very atomized notion of society prevailing in British nineteenth-century liberal thought, it is easy to see why the theory of the natural harmony of interests became so important. There was no other argument permissible within the liberal schema that could explain how societies might hold together. Using the state as an instrument for moral and political socialization, or for promoting levels of equality that might be more conducive to social cohesion, was intolerable to liberal principles. Nor did democracy itself hold much prospect for making societies more cohesive. Both Bentham and Mill were, to use Held's resonant phrase, 'reluctant democrats' (Held, 1983: 11): they believed in representative government, but were wary of universal and equal voting rights, fearing that the enfranchized masses might seek to use their political power to redistribute wealth, thus infringing the freedoms of property-owners. Thus everything had to rest on the optimistic belief that social harmony could be maintained through free exchange in the market. It was Herbert Spencer, the most influential social thinker of his day, who took this argument to its apogee, denying that the state had any need to regulate the market at all (Lukes, 1973). Free exchange and contract, which could be enforced by law, were the only necessary preconditions of social harmony. As he wrote: 'the sole link which remains between men is absolutely free exchange' (quoted in Lukes, 1973: 142). The problem was that the existence of formally free exchange did not necessarily mean that there was a natural equality in exchange relations, and where there wasn't there would be conflict. Despite Marx's detailed dissection of this problem, and its effects, this rarely occurred to thinkers of the British liberal school (Marx and Engels, 1973).

In the end it was a Frenchman, the remarkable Alexis de Tocqueville, who provided liberal thought with a more credible vision of society in his book *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville, 1956). He, like British liberals, believed that civil society was the key to social

harmony but he did not rest his case on the abstract and culture-free doctrine of the natural harmony of interests, and was a clear opponent of individualism. Liberal individualism to him was a:

mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows, and to draw apart with his family and his friends ... at first it only saps the virtues of public life; but in the long run, it attacks and destroys all others, and is at length absorbed into downright selfishness (de Tocqueville, 1956: 193.).

But he found in the vibrant emergent democracy of Jacksonian America, which he observed during a study visit during the 1830s, more than pure individualism. He demonstrated, through a highly insightful analysis of the mores of American community life, how civil society in a democracy could be more than a mere market for exchange. It could also develop a civic culture where active associational life in communities could forge bonds between individuals that went beyond the thin attachments represented by contracts and exchanges. De Tocqueville certainly had his blind spots and there is little appreciation in his writings on the United States of the depth of racial and class divisions in that society. Nevertheless, he provided a more credible account of the foundations of social cohesion in liberal state than his British liberal contemporaries and one that has, consequently, been endlessly recouped in modern writings on social capital.

Republicanism

French republican thought, from Rousseau down to Durkheim and beyond, often explicitly repudiated *laissez-faire* liberalism and differed in crucial ways in the three principal areas of disputation: that is, *vis-a-vis* the relation of the individual to the society and the state; the proper role of the state; and on the importance of collective values. In republican thought, the individual is not antecedent to society and the state, as in liberal discourse, but is constituted by them. Man, to Rousseau, may be born a ‘noble savage’ but ‘we begin,’ he says, ‘to become men only when we have become citizens’ (quoted in Williams, 1961: 94). Liberty and the state

power are not fundamentally opposed, but rather true liberty is seen to lie in the embodiment of the individual interest in the collective interest, the latter of which the state enacts and protects. For Rousseau, the state is the guarantor not the enemy of liberty (Kohn, 2008). Social cohesion – or *social solidarité* in French – arises not so much spontaneously out of civil society and free market exchange, although these may provide a foundation of mutual functional interdependencies. It is primarily something which is cultivated collectively through the formation of the political (Rousseau) or moral (Durkheim) community. For Rousseau, the ideal community was the democratic nation state and, indeed, Rousseau is often seen as the father of modern nationalism, although in fact democracy was more important to him than nationalism (Kohn, 2008). Durkheim could be fervently patriotic in his private life (Lukes, 1973), like Rousseau, but national identity is less central in his writings. However, for both him and Rousseau, collective beliefs and culture, in Raymond Williams' anthropological use of the term (1961), were essential for social solidarity. Thus, shared values and collective political action play a larger role in the republican notion of social solidarity than in liberal notions of social cohesion.

Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762), often considered the foundation stone of republican political philosophy, argued for a 'direct' or 'participative' democracy where, unlike in liberal representative democracy, sovereignty not only derived from the people but also, as David Held puts it, 'stayed there' (Held, 1983). For Rousseau, the people had to exercise their sovereignty actively by creating the 'common will', which, being more than an aggregate of individual wills, could only be forged by common deliberation and action. According to Rousseau's polemical statement: 'sovereignty cannot be represented ... the people's deputies are merely agents ... Any law which the people has not ratified in person is void; it is not law at all.' Representative democracies should thus not therefore be confused with free democracies, says Rousseau. 'The English people believe itself to be free; it is gravely

mistaken; it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as the Members are elected, the people is enslaved; it is nothing.’ (Rousseau, 1983: 141)

The viability of Rousseau’s ‘pure’ form of democracy has been endlessly debated, not least for its practical implications of endless plebiscites, and it is certainly true that Rousseau himself thought it most feasible in relatively small states with close communities, and where the state was territorially secure. However, what is most relevant here is what Rousseau’s political philosophy implied for his conception of social cohesion. Clearly, for Rousseau, the social contract depended to a high degree on a common set of beliefs, which he articulated mostly in political terms, but which he also saw as necessarily manifested in national cultural rituals and ceremonies and so on. Common beliefs arose not spontaneously out of civil society but rather out of collective deliberation and collective political action. Liberty meant not freedom from constraint by society or state, as in liberal thought, as liberty and independence were ‘two things so essentially different, that they reciprocally exclude one another’. Rather, it consisted of ‘not subjecting the will of other people to our own’ as ‘whoever is the master of others is not himself free, and even to reign is to obey’ (quoted in Held, 1993: 22). Liberty and equality are thus intimately linked in Rousseau’s thought, as they would be in the 1789 principles of the French Revolution. The liberal philosophical contradiction between freedom and equality, and therefore – since only the state can vouchsafe equality – between liberty and the state, does not exist in Rousseau’s thought. This is because for Rousseau the basis of liberty is not the sanctity of individual property rights, as in Locke, but the freedom of the individual citizen to co-author, as it were, the democratic political community. In its celebrated legend of the Republic, ‘*Liberté, Égalité et Fraternité*’, the Revolution yoked fraternity to liberty and equality. Rousseau had done the same. Fraternity was forged through collective political action which formed the common will, since ‘every authentic act of the general will binds and favours all the citizens equally’ (188). This, for Rousseau, was the basis of social solidarity.

Durkheim, writing more than a century after Rousseau, also speaks from the heart of the republican tradition on social solidarity and, in fact, became its pre-eminent analyst and exponent during France's Third Republic. From his powerful position as Chair of Education (and later Chair of Education and Sociology) at the Sorbonne (1902–17), Durkheim developed a theory of social solidarity which formed the core of the new discipline of sociology of which he was the leading champion, and this theory influenced generations of French school teachers whom he had trained at the Sorbonne and through his lectures at the École Normale Supérieure. Durkheim was close to the leading socialist, Jean Jaurès, and loosely associated with the political movement, Solidarité, led by Léon Bourgois. This formed a 'third way' between *laissez-faire* liberalism and revolutionary socialism, arguing for labour and welfare legislation, social insurance and public education, and became almost the official ideology of the Third Republic in the two decades before the First World War (Lukes, 1973). Durkheim was a tireless advocate of secular state education, and came out publically for the Dreyfusards in the notorious 1898 Dreyfus Affair.² But, although his intellectual position was broadly that of a liberal reformist socialist, he was no political activist and avoided unambiguous commitments to the socialist cause. Durkheim was essentially a social moralist. Unlike Rousseau, who saw social solidarity in terms of the political community, Durkheim talked more often about the 'moral community'.

Durkheim's theoretical position within the heated contemporary debates about sociology was a complex one and this manifested itself nowhere more than in his theory of social solidarity, which he first elaborated systematically in *The Division of Labour in Society* and later continued to develop through his life. He was a clear opponent of *laissez-faire* liberalism and Spencerian individualism, eschewing the dualistic appositions of the individual and society and freedom and the state, and denying the notion that solidarity could subsist in

² Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army, was falsely accused of treason by anti-semites and became a cause célèbre among French left intellectuals.

free market exchange and contract alone (Parsons, 1968). On the other hand, although a one-time disciple of August Comte, he went beyond Comte's dogmatic utopian positivism and explicitly rejected Comte's stress on absolute moral consensus and the strong state, just as he rejected the view of his contemporary, Ferdinand Tönnies, and of the German socialists, that social solidarity within capitalism could be guaranteed by state action alone (Lukes, 1973). Although his first major work on social solidarity – *The Division of Labour in Society* – argued that the functional interdependences created by the division of labour in industrial societies could largely compensate for the decline of the common belief – what he called the collective conscience – in subsequent writings he tended increasingly to stress the need for a new 'moral community' and for the important role of the state, and particularly state education, in cultivating this. Finally, his position was that both the state and active civil society were necessary to underpin social solidarity. Prefiguring the post-Second World War movement for social partnership, he called for the development of legally authorized professional organizations to regulate market exchanges and foster mutuality within the labour market.

Durkheim's interest in social solidarity started early in his career. His first lecture course at the Sorbonne was entitled 'Social solidarity' and the question he posed was 'What are the bonds which unite people together?' (Lukes, 1973: 137). It was here that he first set out the argument, later to become *The Division of Labour*, which sought to explain the different forms of solidarity that obtained in pre-industrial and industrialized societies. In the works that followed, including *Suicide* and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim continuously returned to this theme, on each occasion slightly modifying his views. Throughout his writing, however, there is a common approach to the subject, which is to understand the nature of different 'social types' of solidarity that could be found historically at different times and places, and to ascertain what were the social foundations of these types. To Durkheim, 'social solidarity' is a completely moral phenomenon which, taken by itself,

does not lend itself to exact observation, nor indeed measurement' (Durkheim, 1964: 64) but his life work was nevertheless to analyze it empirically as well as theoretically.

His book, *The Division of Labour*, begins and ends with reference to liberal theories which Durkheim seeks to contest. In the Preface to the Second Edition, he made clear his opposition to the dualistic liberal theory that dichotomizes individual liberty and the state. 'Nothing is falser,' he writes, 'than this antagonism too often presented between legal authority and liberty' (1993: 5) In the introduction to the study, he notes that Adam Smith was the first to theorize the division of labour but he goes on to criticize both Smithian and Utilitarian explanations of the causes of the phenomenon. It cannot have arisen, he says, as liberals claim, because it was the most efficient way of meeting human wants and of spreading happiness. Progress, he says, has not generally led to greater happiness. Since 'our capacity for happiness is limited' (Durkheim, 1964), it would have been met long before labour had been differentiated to its current level. Furthermore, he argues, if, as the Utilitarians claimed, the desire for happiness was universal, then the pursuit of it alone cannot explain the differential development of the division of labour across societies. Rather, Durkheim claims, there must be a social explanation, which is more likely to lie in the increasing density of human populations and consequent intensity of social interactions in industrialized societies.

Durkheim also notes early on his disagreement with the Spencerian individualist view that social solidarity arises spontaneously out of the division of labour through the exercise of free exchange in the market. Societies based solely on contract, he says, could not hold together '[f]or if interest relates men, it is never than for a few moments' (1964: 204) Expanding on the theme, Durkheim continues:

If we look further into the matter, we shall see that this total harmony of interests conceals a latent or deferred conflict. For where interest is the only ruling force each individual finds himself in a state of war with every other since nothing comes to nullify the egos, and any truce in this eternal antagonism would not be of long duration. There is nothing less constant than

interest. Today, it unites me to you; tomorrow, it will make you an enemy. Such a cause can only give rise to transient relations and passing associations. (Durkheim, 1964, 204).

Durkheim maintains throughout *The Division of Labour* that his is not a theory of the natural harmony of interests. As if to stress the point against doubters, in the Preface to the Second Edition, he asserts that '[w]e repeatedly insist in the course of this book upon the state of juridical and moral anomy in which economic life actually is found' (1964: 1–2). However, Durkheim's analysis in *The Division of Labour* is, in fact, deeply contradictory and it is only in his later works that he fully clarifies his differences with the liberals.

The core argument of *The Division of Labour* is that as societies change from pre-industrial communities to industrial societies, the place left by the decline of 'collective conscience' is filled by the mutual functional interdependencies created by the division of labour. Pre-industrial societies are typically divided into dispersed but relatively homogenous segments that are held together by a powerful collective conscience backed by penal sanctions. In this form of 'mechanical solidarity', the strength of social solidarity is proportionate to the intensity of collective values, which Durkheim sees as proxied in the prevalence of penal law. This exists to uphold the collective conscience, rather than to deter or reform the criminal. With the transition to industrialism, society becomes more differentiated and, at the same time, more interconnected across space. Increasing differentiation through occupational specialization, and the moral individuation that attends it, weaken the hold of the collective conscience over the individual conscience, and collective beliefs thus reduce both in 'volume' and 'intensity'. To accommodate this increasing differentiation, moral beliefs in society have to become more universalized and abstract and, as such, have less power over the individual in particular circumstances. However, as mechanical solidarity is weakened through the decline of collective conscience, a new form of 'organic solidarity' arises, based on the functional interdependencies created by the division of labour. Durkheim sees this manifested (erroneously according to historical critics) in the increasing prevalence now of 'restitutive' (civil) law over

repressive or penal law. This new form of functional interdependence, says Durkheim, provides the foundation of solidarity in the industrial age.

Thus far, Durkheim's theory seems like a more sociological version of the liberal natural harmony of interests theory which he has previously derided. But Durkheim does, as the work proceeds, catalogue a number of ways in which modern society fails to exhibit the level of solidarity predicted by the theory of the division of labour. He notes, *inter alia*, the widespread manifestations of class conflict, the anarchic tendencies in the labour market, and the dehumanization of working life for many people. Much of the conflict he attributes to high levels of inequality in wealth and in exchange relations, which he considers to be a consequence of a lack of meritocracy. This lack is manifested in the continuation of inherited wealth, in the unequal rewards for work and in the misallocation of people to jobs in the labour market. As he explains: the 'hereditary transmission of wealth is enough to make the external conditions under which conflict takes place unequal, for it gives advantages to some which are not necessarily in keeping with their personal worth' (Durkheim, 1964: 378).

So Durkheim acknowledges that social solidarity in existing industrial societies is not all that it might be despite the beneficial effects of the division of labour. However, the problem in the account in *The Division of Labour* is that he considers these manifestations of conflict only 'abnormal forms' that have arisen because of a lack of regulation and because social behaviour has not had time to 'mature' and 'catch up' with the changes in social relations. As he writes:

Profound changes have occurred in the structure of our societies in a very short period of time.

They have become free of the segmented type with a rapidity and in proportions which are without historical parallel. As a result, the morality which corresponds to that social type has regressed, but without the other developing enough to fill the ground the first left vacant in our consciences ... But, on the other hand, the functions that have been disassociated in the course of the upheaval have not had the time to adjust to one another, the new life that has emerged as

if suddenly has not been able to be completely organised, and above all it has not been organised in such a way as to satisfy the need for justice that has never become more intense in our hearts' (quoted in Lukes, 1973: 165).

Unlike Marx, who saw such conflicts as part of the inevitable contradictions of capitalism, Durkheim remains optimistic that such abnormalities will disappear in time.

Durkheim's account of social solidarity in *The Division of Labour* often seems quite contradictory because he, on the one hand, acknowledges the deep divisions within industrial society which undermine social solidarity, yet, on the other, asserts that in time organic solidarity will prevail through a full adjustment to the new division of labour. In his later writings, however, a more consistent and distinctive account of social solidarity emerges. Increasingly, Durkheim accepts that division of labour in itself is not sufficient for social solidarity to be produced and maintained and that there still needs to be a collective morality. Rather than stressing the decline of the collective conscience *per se* he notes in later works the formation of new forms of collective conscience which are more secular, humanist and rational and thus more attuned to an age of individualism (Lukes, 1973). His later masterpiece, *Suicide*, after all, argues that high rates of suicide occur either as the result of the individual being subject to too much social solidarity (Altruistic Suicide) or, more frequently, from the individual becoming disassociated from society's norms, and therefore prone to anomie (Anomic Suicide). In either event, Durkheim is implying the continuing existence and social force of strong social norms. But even these he regards, in his later work, as insufficient. Increasingly, he argues that the state must act as a 'moral force' to supplement the collective values thrown up by society. As societies advance, the functions of the state 'become more numerous and increasingly permeate all other social functions which it therefore concentrates and unifies' (quoted in Lukes, 1973: 324) Most significantly, public education becomes the major institution through which the state works to promote solidarity. 'Society,' Durkheim writes, 'can only survive if there is a sufficient degree of homogeneity' (1956: 81). Education

‘perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands’ (*ibid.*: 70).

But for Durkheim it is not the state alone that must actively promote social solidarity and, in fact, the state in isolation is not able to do it. To rely too much on the state, for Durkheim, is to enter into the trap of the neo-Hegelians and German socialists and to fall prey to authoritarianism that this may promote (Lukes: 1973). ‘Neither political society, in its entirety, nor the state’ says Durkheim, ‘can take over [the] function’ of mitigating the anarchy and anomie of industrial and other conflicts (Durkheim, 1964: 5). On the contrary, this may best be achieved through the formation of occupational groups or professional associations. These should be legally sanctioned by the state, and national in organization, but should act in an autonomous way. As Durkheim argues in his Preface to the Second Edition of *The Division of Labour*: ‘What we see in the occupational group is a moral power capable of containing individual egos, of maintaining a spirited sentiment of solidarity in the consciousness of all workers, of preventing the law of the strongest from being brutally applied to industrial and commercial relations’ (Durkheim, 1964: 10).

It is probably fair to say that Durkheim failed in the end to resolve the question of how far the conflicts and divisions in contemporary capitalism were endemic contradictions, as Marxists and contemporary socialists claimed, or mere abnormalities which could be rectified over time or by reformist state policies. But through his later writings, he did articulate a coherent republican theory of social solidarity which has remained the benchmark for all subsequent debates. His legacy, as one might expect with such a complex and sometimes contradictory thinker, has been distinctly divided, with one line of influence running through the conservative liberal American tradition of structural functionalism (of Robert Merton and Talcott Parsons) and another through the more socialist tradition of French structuralist anthropology (from Marcel Mauss down to Levi Strauss), which centred around the *Année*

Sociologique journal that Durkheim co-founded. However, indirectly, and not least through his advocacy of professional association, which prefigures the modern discourse of social partnership, his legacy has also strongly influenced the middle path of social democracy which today encapsulates his notion of social solidarity perhaps more than any other political tradition.

The romantic conservative tradition

In addition to liberalism and republicanism, we can identify a third major tradition of writing about social cohesion in the West. This derives mainly from the German romanticism of the late eighteenth century and, just as republicanism was a reaction against liberalism, this can be seen as a reaction against French Enlightenment rationalism. Its tangled lines of descent, in France and England as well as in Germany, make it the most difficult of the intellectual currents to trace, but it undoubtedly had a common source whose premises about the nature of societal cohesion were quite distinctive. Raymond Williams (1961) and Terry Eagleton (1975) have referred to the tradition in the broadest terms as ‘romantic’ or ‘organic’ conservatism. All three words capture precisely an important element of the tradition of thinking about society and the state. Cohesive societies here are conceived in terms of stable and durable social hierarchies which are bound together by cultural tradition and by the deference of the individual to the social order and acceptance of his or her allotted place in it. Notions of individual liberty and equality are weak or absent and there is no dichotomy between the individual and society. The latter are seen as fused in an organic whole whose natural harmony is attested by time-honoured cultural traditions embedded in the ‘Volk’. Language, culture and tradition are the true markers of identity, rather than politics or human rights. The collective ‘folk’ replaces the individual ‘citizen’ as the basic building-block of society.

Johann Gottfried von Herder, the late eighteenth-century German poet, philosopher and literary critic, can be seen as the major progenitor of the tradition. It was he who popularized

the notion of the Volk and provided a philosophical rationale for its centrality in the social thought of German and central European intellectuals for generations to come, albeit that his ideas were taken up in ways he clearly never intended. Herder believed that we can only truly *be* and *think* within our native cultural traditions and through our mother-tongue language. Civilization, he wrote ‘grows best, and I would say only, in the particularity of our nation, in its inherited and constantly transmitted vernacular’ (quoted in Kohn, 2008: 433) He saw folk traditions as the natural expression of national community and collected and published folk songs from many regions as testament to these traditions. His writings led to a revival of interest in folk culture far and wide. As Hans Kohn has written, his ‘appeal to the cultural creative force of folk language and folk tradition aroused a new interest and a new pride not only in Germans, but in Czechs, Letts, Serbs and Finns’ (Kohn, 2008: 429).

Herder, however, was the product of a cosmopolitan and humanist intelligentsia in Germany at the time of the late eighteenth-century *Sturm und Drang* movement, and was by no means the xenophobic nationalist that some of his later followers took him to be. He believed in national cultures, but his views were strictly relativistic and no culture was seen to be better than any other. ‘[O]ne people,’ he wrote, ‘should learn incessantly with and from other peoples, until all have understood the difficult lessons, that no people is especially chosen by God, but that truth must be sought and the garden of the common good cultivated by all’ (quoted in Kohn, 2008: 433). He thought not in terms of races but of ‘the human race’, which ‘is one whole’ (*ibid.*). Herder detested the militarism of his Prussian homeland and despised anti-Semites. He celebrated national cultures but was no friend to aggressive nationalism. ‘To speak of fatherland opposed to fatherland in a bloody combat,’ he wrote ‘is the worst kind of barbarism possible in the human language’ (quoted in Kohn, 2008: 441). Nevertheless, Herder’s thought did tend towards the ‘essentialising’ of national cultures. Although he noted some changes, he tended to view national cultures as undivided, organic wholes with more or

less permanent historical trajectories. Hence, although he himself supported the French Revolution, his ideas, not surprisingly, were most readily taken up by conservatives and nationalists. Two legacies derive from his and other romantic writings about national community.

The more 'benign' legacy has been traced by Eagleton (1975) and Williams (1961) in the history of conservative romantic thought in Britain. William Coleridge, following his disillusionment with the course of the Revolution in France, was greatly influenced by the German romantics and had similarly anti-rationalist conceptions of organic traditional communities and the 'spirit of the people'. His influence runs through Carlyle, with his hostility to the harsh 'cash-nexus' of industrial society and the cold calculus of liberal political economy, on through Disraeli, Arnold and Ruskin, with their critique of the spiritually impoverished nature of liberal individualism, and then on to the fin-de-siècle atavistic romanticism of the pre-Raphaelite poets and painters, the designer and socialist thinker, William Morris, and the neo-Hegelian idealism of the liberal political philosopher, T. H. Green. Eagleton describes the elusive amalgam of Burkean conservatism and German idealism as an attempt by the Victorian bourgeoisie to re-legitimize the 'impoverished empiricist liberalism' of the time, 'exploiting the symbolically fertile, metaphysically coercive resources of Romantic humanism, with its nostalgic, reactionary, quasi-feudal social models, to stabilize and ratify bourgeois property relations' (Eagleton, 1975: 81–2). Eagleton is perhaps overly reductive in how he sees the object of their cultural project but there was no doubt that Matthew Arnold was seeking to enrich what he saw as the narrow materialism of liberal middle-class values in England and that this had to do with making the social order more secure. *Culture and Anarchy* (1932) explicitly seeks to mitigate the 'philistinism' of middle-class liberalism with a new culture of 'the best that has been thought and said', and to counter liberal individualism with a revived role for the state. 'Our prevalent notion is,' he writes:

that it is a most happy and important thing for a man to do merely as he likes ... we have not the notion, so familiar on the continent and to antiquity, of the state – the nation in its collective and corporate character, entrusted with the stringent powers for the general advantage in the name of an interest wider than that of individuals (Arnold, 1932 75).

In the twentieth century, there continued to be echoes of this ‘organic conservatism’ in the philosophy of Michael Oakeshott and more recently in the work of the conservative philosopher of aesthetics, Roger Scruton. In his famous essay, *On Being Conservative*, Oakeshott explained that to be conservative:

is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss (Oakeshott, 1991: 408)

A quite moderate, often nostalgic, sense of national consciousness pervades much of British conservative thought. It is the certainties of the national past and the pragmatic adaptations of the present which are celebrated. Habit and custom are cherished because they are rooted and organic. Even prejudice, according to Edmund Burke, was good because it was authentic and born of experience, rather than from abstract ideals (Burke, 1986). National consciousness meant conserving the national traditions rather than stridently asserting the national future.

However, political and social philosophy turned in a quite different direction in nineteenth-century Germany. German nationalism was essentially born in 1806, in an explosive reaction against the Napoleonic occupation, and continued thereafter to be both vehemently anti-French and stridently xenophobic in general (Greenfeld, 2003b). The intellectuals of the German romantic movement had already become disillusioned by the failure of German Enlightenment thought to bring social and political progress in German states and had by and large turned against the French Revolution. They were now humiliated by French aggression and thus became the standard-bearers for the new national assertiveness. Herder and Goethe

kept faith with the Revolution and rational cosmopolitan thought, but Schlegel, Fichte, and many others of their generation, became deeply anti-rationalist and nationalistic (Greenfeld, 2003a).

Nationalism came late to the German states and it had weak liberal political foundations on which to build. Consequently, according to Hans Kohn (2008) and Liah Greenfeld (2003a), it assumed extreme and rebarbative forms. Herder had believed society to be an organic totality where the individual found his true expression and identity in the collective folk culture. Increasingly, post 1806, German thought subsumed the individual entirely into the corporate social identity whose highest expression was the state. Johann Fichte, who became one of the foremost ideologues of the new national revival in Prussia, called, in his celebrated *Addresses to the German Nation*, for a total effort of the Prussian people to build a new corporate state. This was to be based on 'a new moral order' to whose 'sublime will' 'each individual should be subordinate' (cited in Green, 1990). National education would be the expression of this new corporate spiritual identity and the means for national regeneration. 'By means of education we want to mould Germany into a corporate body, which will be stimulated and animated in all individual members by the same interest' (quoted in Bowen, 1981: 258–90). Social cohesion came to be seen in terms of the submission of the individual to the state, since only the state could ensure that the individual could find his or her true expression in the identity of the Volk.

The 'purity' and uniqueness of German language and culture was now widely celebrated. At the same time, the conception of folk identity became cast in increasingly racial terms, which were not only anti-French and but also openly anti-Semitic. Hostility to Jews had been a significant current in German thought since the Reformation; Luther had famously fulminated against Jews. But it now became much more pronounced. As the German nationalist historian, Henrich von Treitschke, later put it:

[t]he powerful excitement of the war of liberation [against the French] brought to light all the secrets of the German character; amid the general ferment all the old and profound hostility to everything Judaic once more made itself manifest (quoted in Greenfeld, 2003a: 379).

The formerly liberal and cosmopolitan poet, literary critic and scholar, Karl Schlegel, came to see the world in increasingly racial terms. 'It is much more appropriate to nature,' he now wrote 'that the human race be strictly separated into nations than that several nations should be fused as has happened in recent times' (quoted in Greenfeld, 2003a: 369). Jews were excoriated for the evils of cosmopolitanism, corruption and soul-less money capitalism. Fichte, like Schlegel formerly a liberal and internationalist, wrote that: '[t]he only way I can see to give the Jews civil rights is to cut off their heads in a single night and equip them with new ones devoid of any Jewish ideas' (quoted in Greenfeld, 2003a: 383). Professor Friel of Heidelberg University, no less visceral than Fichte, and casting his aspersions more widely, wrote in his 1816 treatise, *On the Menace of the Jews to Welfare and Character of the German*: 'Jews are a social pest which owes its special spread to money and is accompanied by misery, tyranny and taxes' (quoted in Greenfeld, 2003a: 385).

Not all German thought, of course, reflected these sentiments. Goethe, for instance, remained a liberal, as did Herder, although the latter died before the furies of the new nationalism were unleashed. But there is no doubting that the confluence of the morbidly extreme irrationalism and racism of the romantic nationalists, and the Hegelian idealization of the state, produced a particularly toxic version of nationalist thought which was to have a deadly historical legacy. John Gray (2007) has recently argued that Nazism owed as much to the modernist utopianism of the Enlightenment rationalists and their positivist heirs because the National Socialists used pseudo racial science and the technology of terror to promote the Aryan ideal. But the argument would get little support from historians, not least because there is such an unmistakable intellectual lineage from Fichte, Friel and Schlegel through Nietzsche and Wagner to the Nazis. As Greenfeld says 'a direct line connected Hitler to the idealistic patriots of the wars of

liberation' (2003a: 384). But tributaries ran through conservative anti-Enlightenment traditions in other countries too. The question is why they came to dominate in some historical contexts rather than others.