A Behavioristic Conception of the Nature of Morals

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With the preconceptions of individual and social behavior developed in last term's work, our next task is to develop from them a conception of the moral order. In order to do this it is essential that we should have some idea of what we mean by the phrase *moral order*. The term moral is often used in a very limited sense to designate a class of actions which are supposed to depend upon the exercise of the will, and which generally have a good deal of mystical connotation. Not by any means all acts of will are referred to but those which have reference to the distinction between good and bad, the questions of value. The things most spoken of in these terms are sex, religion, property rights, and so on. But it seems to me that there is no valid reason for discriminating in kind between this kind of judgement and an economic judgement or a judgement of any other kind, so long as it is a judgement. The only real difference is that our social welfare is more dependent on those judgements generally termed moral, and so this class is separated off a good deal farther than is necessary.

Here we are concerned with behavior, with all that mesh of usages, customs, habits, concepts, which Sumner[38] terms the *mores*, and this seems to be essentially one single whole, with all the different parts of it having a good many characteristics in common. So we will consider *the moral order* to denote the whole organization of social behavior, and as such attempt to analyze it, to bring out its principal characteristics and their relations, and in particular to show how the portion of it which might in the narrow sense be called moral or ethical fits in with the rest. [page break: 2]

It seems reasonable to look at society as we know it from three main viewpoints. In the first place there is its actual societal structure, the facts of the organization of civilization. These facts are all related and intertwined, but just as in the mammalian body we can distinguish a circulatory system, a nervous

system, a digestive system, though none of them has any significance by itself, we can pick out three principal phases of societal structure.

First, there is technology. Man in his many centuries on the earth has gradually evolved a myriad number and variety of technical processes, which serve every conceivable purpose. This group of the mores is concerned with man's utilization of the natural and material resources about him. He has learned to make snow igloos, houses, adobe huts, tents, or what not, as a protection from adverse weather conditions. He has developed an almost unbelievable number of different sorts of weapons, from wooden clubs to sixteen-inch howitzers, for the purpose of killing game, of self-defence against man or beast, or for offence in war. Sometimes an implement has been conceived to supply a definitely felt need. Probably more often, especially in primitive cultures, an adaptation of something already existing has been hit upon, largely by accident, made use of, and perhaps in the course of time improved upon. The accumulative action of time has given almost every people a vast store of such processes with which they can improve and regulate the material conditions of their existence.

The second structural section of the mores in which we are interested composes our institutions. Even in the most primitive state, men who live together must of necessity regulate each other's conduct by some sort of institutional system. There are two principal sorts of forces at work here. In the first place individuals cannot [page break:3] live together, doing exactly as their own impulses and whims dictate, for any length of time at all before these impulses of different individuals are going to conflict. Some sort of a compromise is imperative if both are to continue to live in the same territory. Of course it may happen, and often has, that physical conflict will ensue, resulting in the extermination of one party or the other. This, however, does not go on forever, but compromise is resorted to frequently enough to give rise to institutions.

Then, with the gradual emergence of what we call intelligence, we are likely to have people cooperating because they realize, no matter how vaguely, that they can do more, can fight better and are more likely to live long collectively than individually. Along with the development of technique comes differentiation of functions, what in modern industrial terms is called the division of labor. With any intelligence at all people are bound to see that a community can become better housed and fed, and can take better care of its young with some sort of mutual aid. Institutions, then, appear to be the adaptation, in terms of human relationship, of individuals toward living in a society, as opposed to a completely individual existence. In the conditions to which these institutions are adapted, there is a large enough margin of variability so that the solution by different peoples of the same problem need by no means be the same. To control people's relations, that is, in government, we have such wide variations as absolute despotism and ideal democracy. In the family there exist both polygyny and polyandry, and monogamy which lies between. It is much the same as in biology where to the problem of flying we have three or four absolutely distinct solutions. The difference in the structure and means of aviation of a dragon fly and a hawk is noteworthy, though they both fly by means of wings.

Instances of the same sort of thing both in society and biology might be mul-[page break:4]-tiplied almost without number, but the principle remains the same, and accounts in large measure for the endless variety of institutions. This of course applies to the other forms of societal structure fully as well.

The other principal element in the structure of a society consists in the rites and ceremonies, the ritual. To bring out its relation to the other main elements we might say that in general this denotes the relation of man to the unknown forces, the supposedly supernatural, or what Sumner calls the aleatory element. When he could explain and use a phenomenon of nature, the primitive man would make use of a plain and matter of fact technology. When he could use it but could not explain it he thought that some special technique, not founded wholly on rational or utilitarian grounds was necessary. This has the fault of most analyses of its kind in being an over-simplification, but I think it serves to bring out the relation of ritual to the other two categories of societal structure.

Durkheim, in his book on the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* defines religion, of which, though not exclusively, ritual is characteristic, as pertaining to the idea of the sacred.[39] He says that the most fundamental distinction in primitive life is that between sacred and profane. The sacred always deserves special consideration and treatment, that is, ritual consideration. The distinction is by no means that between good and bad. The devil is a perennial sacred being, but is none the less evil. Sacred always seems to carry the connotation of mystery, lack of understanding. There is no absolute standard of sanctity. In one civilization or another practically everything under the sun has been considered sacred. Sanctity is a concept, not an objective fact. It is founded upon the idea of force, *mana, shaman*, and the like, essentially of mysterious force. [page break: 5]

Durkheim, however, recognizes also a certain intellectual element in religious behavior. There is a thought content, a cosmology in any religion no matter how rudimentary it may be. Of these two, however, he asserts that the former is by far the more important. The intellectual content is inevitably dependent upon the state of objective knowledge, the science, of the time. The other is a side of human nature that must always exist. It is a social phenomenon, the product of a synthesis of individual consciousnesses and does truly represent something more than the single individual, but it is not therefore necessarily of inexplicable origin. Whatever may be said about it, in any society that has existed to date, ritual has always been one of the most important elements in the mores and as such must be understood as far as possible along with the rest of them.

Along with the structural organization of the mores we have two other aspects which are more directing forces of them than facts of their organization. These are knowledge, which includes science, that is, the whole intellectual side of the mores, and taste which [is] essentially the emotional side. Knowledge is the means by which technology is added to and preserved from generation to generation. In every society there is a large amount of technological lore which makes it unnecessary for each individual to start where his remote ancestors did

in gaining a material living. The same is true of the traditional knowledge with respect to ritual and to institutions. By this means society receives an immense cumulative inheritance absolutely apart from its biological heredity and profits greatly thereby.

Taste, the emotional side, is by no means clearly distinguished from the intellectual side of the mores. Knowledge is essentially objective, the aim of it being to get outside the self and observe. Emotion is subjective. It consists in letting yourself go in more or less total disregard of rational considerations. These definitions [page break:6] however, will apply only to extreme forms. Almost all the mores contain both the elements almost inextricably mingled together. Conventions almost all have a modicum of rationality or pseudo-rationality, no matter how small it may be, and even more so, especially primitive mores, all contain a great deal larger element of emotion, most of which is purely traditional. Taste as we understand it consists of both elements. It is probably unjustified except for purposes of analysis to attempt to make a distinction between them because there seems to been [*sic*] no evidence that they are not essentially the same thing, one being, however, considerably more accurate in an objective sense than the other.

This ideational and emotional aspect of the mores must be understood as a quality of the structural aspect, applying with equal force to all three classes of the latter. There is institutional knowledge, technological knowledge, ceremonial knowledge, and taste in all these departments. Moreover, all these three departments of societal structure are so related that no one occurs absolutely without the others. There are institutions by which technology is utilized. There is a ritual connected with almost all technological processes, and there is a technique of all ceremonies. A coal mine is an institution which finds its sole justification for existence in its utilization of technique. A government has a different significance, however, and although there is elaborate technique and ritual connected with it, these are secondary, not essential. Its primary function is institutional. It is conceivable that Congress could still perform its functions without its present elaborate technique of disorder, but the technique without the institution means nothing, while the latter alone may have some slight significance. This is the sort of relation which makes our distinction between the three structural forms of the mores valid. It must not be taken to mean that this distinction is [page break: 7] absolute, but merely that it serves to clarify in our minds the relations of the things discussed. The only reason for ever making a distinction is to bring out relations which would otherwise be missed.

Since we have attempted to make some sort of an analysis of the mores in general, let us see what sort of light this analysis can throw upon one particular phase of them which has great significance in our subsequent discussion of morals. Taste is a word which represents our supposed faculty of free choice, and art is one field in which this taste is reputed to be most exercised. Perhaps a short discussion and analysis of art will enable us to see some of the essential characteristics of taste in general.

Art is a term which is used, like most significant terms, in more than one

sense. We speak of arts of all kinds, but we divide them principally into two classes, the useful or the industrial arts and the fine arts. The question is what are the points in common between these two classes, and what are their significant differences. An art, I take it, as the term is used in the useful arts especially, refers to technical perfection of some kind or other. In this fundamental sense a clever artisan is an artist. Stradivarius was a preeminent artist. The modern workman, no matter how humble his occupation, practises an art. He does some specific technical job and does it well. In this sense the term represents the consummation of what Veblen calls the *instinct of workmanship.*[40] To make something with the hands and brain, whether it be for practical purposes or not, that is intrinsic art, in its most general sense.

In the fine arts we find all this in clearly recognizable form. Every artist in the conventional sense is a highly trained workman who turns out a product of his creative genius. It is a technical achievement of high order and purely as such is deserving of the [page break:8] commendation of other workmen and of[41] people who can in some measure understand the technical difficulty of the task and the masterful way in which it has been accomplished. But if you try and tell an artist or an art critic that any particular piece of painting, sculpture, music, or poetry represents a technical achievement and solely that, he will immediately flare up in righteous indignation. He thinks there is something else to it. What is it and from whence does it proceed?

Perhaps the most rational way to find an answer to this question is to look at art in its most rudimentary form among primitive peoples. When we study such art what do we find? In the first place we find a technique, which is probably not very highly developed according to our own standards. Most of the representations of natural forms are crude. The music is wild and discordant to our cultivated ears. But this is by no means the most significant thing about it. The striking thing is that we always find it associated with religion, with ceremonial observances of some kind or other. Sculpture is representation in concrete form of the primitive gods. Music such as it is is sacred music, it is part of the religious ceremonies. Writings are all sacred, also in large part a portion of the ritual. Art most decidedly belongs to the category of the sacred.

This ceremonial origin of all the contemporary fine arts at once throws a flood of light upon the psychological attitude which is commonly taken toward them. Owing to the change which has taken place in our ways of looking at things, in our religious conceptions and our ceremonies, art and religion have become more or less detached and in this present detachment we are very prone to overlook their common origin. Even now, however, this detachment is not by any means complete, and it is evident from a thorough analysis of the problem that the two represent essentially the same attitudes [page break:9] of mind.

Here, I think, it is profitable to try and distinguish two types of attitudes toward art which are to a large measure separate. The first is that of the genuine critic. It is invariably true that no one gains acceptance as a real critic of art who has not, through long association and usually a good deal of painstaking study,

become thoroughly able to appreciate the technical excellence or lack of it in the work which he either praises or condemns. When he talks about excellence and purity of line and form and such things, in so far as he talks about anything, it is the technical construction of the piece. All this requires an easy familiarity with it, even if not an actual mechanical proficiency. But there is another class of people who *appreciate* art who have had no such advantages of artistic education. What does it mean in this case? I think it is very evident that here almost invariably we have what Mr. Veblen[42] would call leisure class motives. Artistic taste is affected, with no rational justification, because it is the thing to do, because other people whom we admire or envy do it. We say we admire a thing if we think that such admiration will meet with the approval of the *elect*. Millionaires will pay fabulous sums for pictures so that they will be known to possess them and to have paid such and such a sum for them, whether they know consciously that this is their motive or not. It is all part of the continuous competition for excelling one's neighbors in ostentatious display of wealth for no obvious utilitarian reason except personal satisfaction and aggrandizement.

This presents rather a seamy side of artistic appreciation which we do not like to admit to be true. We all idealize art as the expression of the higher spiritual aspirations of the human soul. Like all things we worship, we are very loathe to let an unprejudiced [page break:10] intellect play upon it lest it should expose some flaw. But also like everything else, it has its material side which is obnoxious to the sensitive soul, and any such side, in a purely rational (if such a thing be possible) analysis must be taken account of and explained as far as that can be done.

It is, then, perfectly true that art means something besides technique, that it expresses something, but it is necessary to make very strict qualifications as to just what it is that that something is, and just how it is expressed. In the first place it is expressed in all cases by means of a complex technique. It is absurd to think that the greatest passage in Shakespeare if presented before a man who was absolutely illiterate, no matter how great his natural abilities, would mean any more to him than a mere jumble of marks upon a piece of paper. Painting and sculpture are less artificial because they express by the technique of pictorial representation, which is the most readily intelligible of all techniques of communication. Music is more of the order of writing, though since it is of less wide diffusion, it is not so widely known. Thus appreciation of an art is absolutely dependent on enough of a knowledge of the technique for it to act as a medium of communication. But that is not all. A man who is educated just enough to read can make some sense of Shakespeare, but he needs a great deal more than that. He needs a knowledge of the time in which Shakespeare lived, the conditions under which he wrote, and if possible of his character. The greater the knowledge about a work of art, the more intelligible and meaningful it becomes. Beyond knowledge of material technique there is need of knowledge of the general sort of idea that the artist is trying to express. And it does not follow that knowledge enough to appreciate one art in any way fits one the better to appreciate another except in so far as that knowledge bears upon both. [page break: 11]

We can, therefore, find nothing innate in art except the technical excellence of it. That is the only thing about it that cannot be traced to some other source. The performance of this technique must be acquired by the artist and the other things with which it becomes associated are products of his experience, his environment working on his own peculiar turn of mind or whatever you choose to call it. It appeals to and is the product of essentially the same aspect which finds expression in ritual, ceremonial and religion. None the less, the particular form of it is a result of education in the broadest sense of the word. It is not innate any more than democracy is innate and unalterable in the American people. True, one artist can be much greater than another, and so even if their technical proficiency is approximately equal, but it is not because the one was born with a predestined longing to paint the Virgin Mary, but that the one interprets the idea which he works out so much better than the other for various reasons. A great deal of it may well be due to associations and a great deal more to a superiority of intellectual excellence which is most certainly inborn. But the idea that a child with no previous contact with a culture can, out of a clear sky so to speak, give one of the *immortal* expressions of some prevailing specific aspect of that culture is nothing short of absurdity. Such an idea is nothing but pure obscurantism and preconceived prejudice.

The strange thing about it is how an assertion contrary to the prevailing views on such a subject as art will immediately bring forth a storm of hot-headed emotional fire-works. It is one of the most characteristic features of the mores, that if the hypothetical origin of any of them is explained away in favor of a more reasonable conception, this will at once be taken to represent a wholesale indictment of the mos[43] itself. If aesthetic appreciation is not [page break:12] innate in fully developed form, of what possible value can it be? You destroy one conception of it and so destroy the thing itself. Such statements are purely sentimental, blind ravings. A scientific and rational criticism makes absolutely no judgements as to ultimate values. All it aims to do is to find out the plain objective truth, and to do that regardless of the consequences on pet ideas. It lets the facts speak for themselves.

But does this conception of art make it valueless and meaningless? Just because a thing is explicable it looses[44] a great deal of influence over the common mind. The average man has a well-developed inferiority complex and likes nothing better than to be awed and struck with wonder. There is a wide-spread unwillingness to thinking things out. But this explanation, to my mind, has no cheapening effect to a reasonably enlightened point of view. It seems to be an almost universal fact that things worth while in the best and widest sense are by no means easy of attainment. Any old person cannot go out and off-hand, without training, excel in any field of endeavor he wishes. Practically all excellence in any field requires hard work and steady application. Is it strange, then, that both great attainments as an artist and worthy appreciation of the artist's work should be in the same category; that it should require long association with or submersion in the cultural influences that have produced said work? To

my mind this is by no means surprising, upon reflection, but is on the other hand the only logical condition of affairs.

Thus we get a glimpse of some of the more general characteristics of the mores. First we find that their origins are all lost in obscurity, but that they can readily be traced back to early enough stages to in large measure account for the peculiar character they may bear. We find that with regard to any particular [page break:13] field of behavior there is generally a wide range of different usages possible, and that in one culture or another each one of the possibilities is likely to occur. Evidently without physical detriment to the organism, both chastity and the lack of it are practicable, and we find varying degrees of both in almost infinite diversity. We find that in the matter of clothing anything from a single string to covering for the whole body except the eyes may be standard of modesty.

As Sumner so insistently asserts, within these limits of physical possibility the mores can make almost anything right. Often they go beyond the limits of welfare and then sooner or later some sort of readjustment has got to occur, though it may cause great tribulation in coming. We find that most of our strongly conceived prejudices are not based on absolute truth at all but merely on the mores. Sumner shows by a crushing accumulation of evidence that the exact contraries of our ideas on all the things we think of as most sacred are or have been held with no twinge of conscience on the part of the holders. Murder, lying, thievery, prostitution, notably of all things in connection with religious ceremonies, incest, everything in the field of moral action. How can that fail to show us the arbitrariness of our ideas, to give us understanding and tolerance of other ideas? But the mores are not enforced by rational action. They work through blind emotion, prejudice and obstinacy. There is an inertia about them that is tremendous when it is realized to its fullest extent. What is customary is right. The only thinking done by the masses is rationalization, invention of clever arguments by which to justify the current mores, and it is invariably an appeal to absolute standards which in reality do not exist. Only a few can get far enough out of the mores to be able to intelligently criticize them and to direct their own actions [page break:14] to some extent by rational, highly utilitarian motives; to do things not because others do them, but because there is some reasonable ground on which to think them worth doing. Even these few people attain this emancipation only in very limited spheres of existence. You can trust a physicist's word about atomic structure, but he will almost inevitably follow the current mores of his time with regard to other departments of life. It is very dangerous to allow an authority in one field to make general statements about another. A most excellent example of this sort of thing is a recent little book by a well-known mathematician in which by perfectly rational reasoning he develops the idea of higher dimensionality and then with almost incredibly uncritical naïveté proceeds to apply it to an explanation of all the petty miracles of the bible. This, in view of current knowledge about the history of the document in question, is one of the most asininely sophisticated pieces of rationalization that it is possible to imagine.[45]

All this goes to show the extremely small and incomprehensive place occu-

pied by intelligence in shaping the mores, and to show something of what those mores are. Surely the next question to take up is how these mores have developed, since there seems to be no argument at all as to the fact that they have developed by a series of changes from earlier forms. What is the nature of this evolutionary process, as nearly as we can determine with the best evidence at our command?

In the middle ages for the most part the mores were accepted without question as of more or less absolute origin. If they were not accepted they were rejected as spurious, but there was little or no real attempt to present a connected picture of the manner in which they continually change, or to trace their history from an evolutionary standpoint. The evolutionary point of view did not belong [page break:15] to that time, and its application to ethics and moral behavior is definitely correlated with the Darwinian movement in biology in the latter half of the nineteenth century. From then on, following the change in the biological conception of evolution with a good deal of correspondence, we can trace a change in the views of moral evolution so that the idea of it which is current in the best literature on the subject in the past five years or so is rather different from that of forty or fifty years ago.[46] Hence it would perhaps clarify our notions if we should go over a short review of the evolutionary theory in biology and show its recent developments, in short, the evolution of evolution itself.

The outstanding characteristic of the early theories of evolution is to interpret the process in terms of a definite end in view, which end is almost always the development of the mighty races of men. It assumes the said evolution has been a steady gradual change in one foreordained direction, and it is assumed that what we see is the only possible result. In view of our knowledge of the mores this need not be surprising, in fact it is just what we should expect. The first tendency with any new hypothesis is to try to make it fit our emotional prejudices rather than the empirical facts, and it always takes a long struggle to get away from this tendency. Hence we have the general statement of biological evolution that it is the process of change from simple to complex, from amoeba to man, etc. This statement seems to err by over-simplifying the problem very greatly.

The latest research work in biology, especially in the field of heredity and genetics, tends to bring this out, and the present attitude is a great deal less of a dogmatic assertion and more of a tentative hypothesis. It is in short about this: Organic evolution is carried on by the mechanism of inheritance. At more or less irregular intervals and in a manner not very clearly understood, [page break:16] rather abrupt changes or mutations tend to appear which from then on breed true to the type thus established. Whether or not any specific mutation will survive or not depends upon its relation to the environment in which it finds itself. If it gives its holder a decided advantage in coping (not necessarily intelligently) with conditions, it will be almost certain to be perpetuated. If it has a decidedly detrimental effect, the stock will surely tend to disappear, and there are all degrees of probability in between. Thus the direction that an evolutionary

process takes is seen to depend not so much on a fore-ordained, continuous and inevitable fate, but upon the specific conditions in which any given variation happens to be plunged to sink or swim. A slight change in the conditions may mean a tremendous alteration of the result, or it may mean very little. Darwin, in his statement of his own idea of evolution, was very careful to keep dogmatism out of it and amassed an amazing amount of evidence, letting it speak a good deal for itself. It is largely due to his followers that his name is associated with the dogmatic unilinear conception of evolution. Of course he did not have any knowledge of Mendelian inheritance and in particular of the modern theory of mutations, but these theories are the result of a great deal of subsequent exceedingly careful scientific work, and were by no means evident at first glance. This dogmatic interpretation of Darwinism is a typical example of how ideas are twisted by the mores to fit their own particular preconceptions.

The work of the nineteenth-century sociologists and anthropologists can be easily recognized as directly influenced by this early unilinear theory of evolution. One of the earliest and most flagrant examples is that of Lewis H. Morgan in his *Ancient Society.*[47] I think that by way of comparison it will pay to take up his scheme somewhat in detail. [page break: 17]

Morgan divides his particular line of cultural evolution into three principle stages, which he designates as savagery, barbarism, and civilization respectively, and the two first he divides into three subdivisions each; the lower, middle and upper status of savagery and the lower, middle and upper status of barbarism. Civilization he does not subdivide, evidently assuming that when a society gets to that stage it has evolved, the process is over. He makes it an absolute and specific rather than a relative term. Each of these divisions and subdivisions he definitely marks off by some particular and purely arbitrarily selected cultural phenomenon. For instance, he says that the lower status of savagery extends from the dawn of the human race until the use of fire and of fish for subsistence appears; the condition of barbarism is initiated by the invention of pottery; and the lower boundary of civilization is delineated by the use of the phonetic alphabet in some form or other.

Such a scheme as this makes the task of the ethnologist in classifying different cultures infinitely easier than it might be otherwise. All that needs to be done is to apply the formula. A particular tribe uses domesticated animals; very well, it is in the middle status of barbarism, regardless of whether these animals are dogs, cattle, elephants or trained mice. The character of the rest of the tribe follows a priori. It would of course have a rather definite religious system, form of family organization, and what not. Moreover, that is not all. Our ethnologist may predict with the courage of his convictions that said tribe will within a definite course of time smelt iron, even if they live in the middle of the prairies of Kansas, hundreds of miles from the nearest iron deposits. How else could they tread their predestined path. The whole scheme is beautiful, the only trouble being that to careful investigators it does not seem to hold. It is too good to be true.

This is probably the most naïve example that is to be found and [page break:18]

(in) the light of present knowledge of anthropology appears of course utterly ridiculous. It does, however, serve to illustrate the general trend to those earlier ethnologists' theories, and the fact that, with the perspective of fifty years or so, we can find rather obvious flaws in their reasoning without much difficulty. Sir Henry Maine does a piece of work that is rather more careful.[48] He makes a careful study of ancient societies from the legal point of view and mainly on the basis of an analysis of the Roman system of *patria potestas,* and its evolution draws the conclusion that evolution in that line has been from status to contract. In the earlier stages, he says, a man was born into a given place and with his duties all laid out for him, in which he as an individual has no particular say. Later, according to Maine, he comes to act more as a free individual, to have the power to contract his own relations. Of course it is easy to see in this the hand of British individualism of the nineteenth century, which so completely dominated the thinking of the time, but how, if it is such an [*sic*] universal principle, does it account for such a thing as the present state of the Hindu caste system? Has not that eastern civilization had as long a history as ours,[49] and has it not produced philosophies and religions which are among the highest accomplishments that we know of? Can we say that Hindu civilization is now in the lower status of barbarism, or something equally arbitrary, and if left to itself will in due time come around to our point of view through the inevitable course of human evolution? It may do so through the spread of industrialism, but certainly not through an inevitable line of internal development.

In the field of ethics we find that essentially the same attitude has been taken with regard to the evolution of morals. In the Dewey and Tufts *Ethics*[50] three stages in the development of conduct are recognized: instinctive, customary, and conscientious or intelligent. [page break:19] This seems to be clearly dictated by the preconceptions of a time but lately past and a point of view which is still very widely held, that the highest development of the race is reasonable action, and evolution of the modes of conduct tends in that specific direction. Hobhouse,[51] in his exhaustive treatise on the subject, follows the same line of argument, and his book has been revised within the last ten years. He gives various stages in this evolution of reason from the beginnings of amoeboid behavior through the whole gamut of tropisms, reflexes, instincts, habits, and intelligence. Undoubtedly all these stages exist, and probably human intelligence has evolved principally on some such line, but is that any reason for assuming that in the nature of things they are bound to follow each other except in the event of very particular circumstances having favored this sequence?

In criticizing these various theories we must go back to two very important ideas that were brought out in the work of the last term. These were the two modes by which culture was developed, internal growth and diffusion. The first and probably one of the most glaring defects in all these a priori theories of the evolution of society and of morals is the failure to recognize the tremendous part played by diffusion. Here is a phenomenon which is extremely potent and yet has no satisfactory counterpart in organic morphological evolution, and hence makes the comparison with it rather dangerous if held too closely. In biology the

myth of the inheritance acquired of characteristics, to intelligent students of the subject, has pretty well disappeared into thin air. But the essence of culture is the fact that its development is cumulative and any feature if it becomes the property of all succeeding generations, especially with the use of writing, which relieves the strain on memory so considerably.

Thus no individual, and in like manner, no one culture, develops all its own cultural features from within as a biological race does through the variation of the germ plasm. It acquires [page break:20] such a large proportion as to make this acquirement the ruling factor in the lives of all but a very few individuals, and an important one in all except completely isolated societies, that is it is the fact which forms the basis of the mores. What happens to a tribe in Morgan's middle status of savagery if it is conquered by a people who smelt iron, who have domesticated animals, pottery, and a phonetic alphabet? Does it proceed slowly on its predestined course and acquire each of these elements through its own invention in due order? Of course not. In a very short period of time it has all of them as an integral part of its own culture, it skips several of Morgan's stages and goes on from its new status, which may be full-blown civilization. This is exactly what happened to the African slaves when they were brought to America as plantation labor. These theories fail to account adequately for a fact which is probably the most significant difference between cultural and animal evolution, the fact which is the basis of the cumulative character of the former.

But most of them also err through over-simplification, through assuming that a culture is a great deal more of a unit than it really is. They trace the evolution of one phase of civilization, mark it off into stages, and assume that the rest of it will be present in essentially the same proportions. It is assumed that a culture advanced in technology is also advanced in morals, in institutions, in ritual, in all its aspects. The facts, however, will absolutely fail to bear this out. Some tribes have a great development of secret societies, in others, not necessarily less advanced, they are almost entirely lacking. The Romans were preeminently a military and legal people, and Greeks a philosophic people; not necessarily innately such, but all the factors combined so that in the end the features that stood out were distinctive. So in our own civilization the great outstanding [page break 21] fact is the tremendous development of technology.[52] Other aspects have developed, but there has never before been anything of the character of industrialism, and its advent has been out of all proportion to the contemporary change in morals, literature, philosophy, government or religion. True, it has its effects on all these departments, indeed it transforms the whole character of things, they must all tend to some sort of a state of equilibrium, but the great changes which must come are secondary, not primary. Most of the maladaptations which industrialism has caused are due to the fact that this catching up of the other aspects of civilization are so much slower than the rise of industrialism has been.

Much the same thing may be said of the particular accident of organic evolution which produced the hyper-specialization of the nervous system which we find in man. A man is no match for a lion or tiger in hand to hand combat. His

vascular and reproductive systems are much the same as those of the other mammals. Every bone in his body has its undoubted counterpart in the skeleton of a cat. But he has something which none of the others have, and which makes the others of comparative insignificance in the fate of the world. Whatever happens the human race is not likely to be exterminated by the physical strength of the carnivores. The rise of intelligence is a highly specialized phenomenon such as never appeared on this planet before, and while it is due to an immensely complex chain of causes, it is a very specific thing.

But if we cannot hold the unilinear theory of moral evolution, what can we hold? As Lowie so aptly says, about the only thing we can do is to get down and get all the facts we can possibly dig out and make such generalizations as we can piece out of them.[53] He says that the very fact of diffusion and the recognition of its importance is in itself a generalization of the first significance.[54] Another [page break:22] is the fact of cultural inertia.[55] What we want is the truth, not a comforting of our minds by a superficial vindication of our prejudices, so we have to realize and accept the tremendous complexity of civilization and in particular of the mores, and their constant process of change and revision. We have to get at the causes of this change by careful analysis of the endless mass of evidence, and draw conclusions when we can, and only when we are reasonably justified in doing so. We have to recognize the irrational origin of many of the mores, and make significant allowance for it in our theories.

But it is likely to be objected that so far in human history all theories have been based on preconceptions and prejudices. How, if we have no reasons to think ourselves the first and only exceptions, are we to be sure that ours are any better than those of Morgan and Maine? Since we have no absolutely certain standard to go by, how are we able to draw any valid conclusions? Will not our theories be as much colored by science and relativism as Maine's was with individualism? This is of course ultimately an unanswerable objection, but we have to act on some sort of preconceptions, and this by no means makes it inevitable that one set of preconceptions is no better than another. The only real justification of any theory is whether it works or not, whether it fits the facts. If we think we can do anything by magical incantations, it is all right so long as we get the results we are looking for. If we do not get the results it is time we modified our ideas to find out why we do not get them. The test between the phlogiston theory of chemistry and the atomic theory is not which we think is more attractive, but which fits the facts better. We can explain a great many more things by means of one than by the other, so we employ the one which is most useful. The reason that the evolution theory has superseded the biblical story of the [page break:23] creation is not that we are prejudiced in favor of science, but that the latter hypothesis left[56] a great many important and evident facts of geology, comparative anatomy, palaeontology, embryology and genetics entirely unexplained, while the former threw a flood of light on all those facts, such a flood as cannot fail to convince anyone who is not an incurable obscurantist.

All theories have to explain facts, otherwise they are entirely useless. The

theory is valuable just in so far as it explains facts which are comprehensive and significant. If new facts turn up which do not fit the theory, the theory must be modified, not the facts. It is the universal inertia of the mores which so often accomplishes[57] the latter result. So it is with our theories of societal and moral evolution. Since the time of Morgan and Darwin a great many facts have come to light which have necessitated a radical revision of the then current theories of evolution in biology and in sociology and ethnology. We do not blame the earlier men for their mistakes, and we recognize the value of their work, but we do not accept it as final. We know more than they did, hence our generalizations can be more comprehensive and more accurate than theirs, and it is our manifest duty to make them as much so as we can with the facts we have, and to get as many more facts as we can. It means painstaking research, but the end is worth while if anything is worth while, and that is about as much as we can say.

All this work has brought out the great extent to which our mores are dependent on the past, the small amount which any individual can do to change them, and the fact that nevertheless they are in a continual state of flux and motion, with no ascertainable and certain goal. But it has also brought out the presence and growing importance of that aspect of the mores which we call intelligent behavior, and it is to a closer and more detailed study of the nature and the function [page break:24] of this force that we should think of turning next. But that must be reserved for a much later and more enlightened time in the progress of this study of the moral order.