

SOCIAL CHANGE

WITH RESPECT TO CULTURE
AND ORIGINAL NATURE

BY

WILLIAM FIELDING OGBURN

Professor of Sociology at Columbia University



NEW YORK B. W. HUEBSCH, INC. MCMXXIII

SOCIAL CHANGE

PREFACE

The vast social changes which characterize our age raise to a plane of great importance for sociology theories of social evolution and practical programmes. Our interest in the pages which follow is not primarily with specific programmes but rather with the more general and perhaps more fundamental aspects of social change, which are not, of course, without bearing on particular issues. The treatment deals with inquiries concerning the nature of these changes, why social changes occur, why certain conditions apparently resist change, how culture grows, how civilization has come to be what it is. These questions involve considerations of the nature and frequency of inventions, and of the part will power and human nature play in producing these processes. Are these changes solely in man's social heritage or are they changes in the biological nature of man? Could the great progress that has taken place since the last ice age have occurred without changes in mental ability and human nature? We are also interested in inquir-

ing how satisfactorily human nature fares amidst these many changes, whether the inherent nature of man is better adapted to the new conditions than to the old, and how serious and frequent are the social maladjustments. To discuss these questions means that we must draw somewhat on researches in several different sciences, namely, biology, anthropology, psychology and economics, as well as on prior researches in sociology.

The reader naturally wishes to know how scientific consideration of such broad questions can be made. The most widely current conception of scientific method stresses the verification by data. That the collection of data is of the greatest importance is not denied. But the data must be relevant to some inquiry; there must be something to verify. Therefore the construction of hypotheses must take its place along with the accumulation of evidence; the random collection and study of facts are not indeed the sole factors in formulation of theories. There is always something that the human being wants to know; there is thus a demand for knowledge as truly as there is an economic demand. Particularly in the early development of a science the demand is much greater than the supply of material; and the demand is often not specific and over-simplified. Thus the inquiries demanded are often broad, and later it is found that they break down into a series

of special inquiries. In the early history of a particular science there is therefore a wide field to be surveyed preliminary to the verification of special hypotheses.

The analysis of complex issues depends somewhat on facts and the more complete the data the better will be the analysis. With the available facts incomplete, however, good analysis demands that special hypotheses be formulated in such a way that they can be later proved or disproved by facts. The merit of the formulation depends upon a number of factors, especially a certain sagacity for the significant and a knowledge of the trend of the development of the sciences as well as the popular demand. The greatest source of error in valuations and in conclusions is probably prejudice or emotional bias. In the absence of complete data, it is thought that the most effective check against error is an examination of the sources of one's own prejudices.

The reader may be annoyed because the conclusions which follow are less emphatic than he customarily finds and because a good many suppositions and probabilities are involved. It seems to the writer that while such inconclusiveness as is found is regrettable, yet it is imposed by the magnitude of the inquiries and the scarcity of data. Despite these limitations there is value in the critical estimates of the various theories.

[vii]

Suspended judgment is quite as necessary in the development of knowledge as bold theories, and should accompany them.

It has not been the purpose, particularly, to formulate a treatment of the sociological questions which would show them in their proper perspective or according to their relative importance as a set of general sociological principles. The work may therefore seem somewhat uneven. The emphasis has been of course, to a certain extent, according to importance, but it has also been the aim to present, if not new material and original considerations, at least formulations that are not widely known among sociological readers.

It has unfortunately not been possible to give credit to all sources for the information and conclusions found in the text. No one indeed ever honestly knows the origin of his ideas. They come as a result of a body of information gathered from innumerable sources during years of study. However, to many readers the current stock of sociological knowledge will be familiar and it will be known when such a stock of information has been drawn on.

W. F. O.

COPYRIGHT, 1922, BY
B. W. HUEBSCH, INC.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

Second printing, March, 1923

Third printing, August, 1924

CONTENTS

PART I

THE SOCIAL HERITAGE AND THE ORIGINAL NATURE OF MAN

	PAGE
1. SOCIAL HERITAGE	3
2. THE ORIGINAL NATURE OF MAN . . .	7
3. THE CONFUSION OF CULTURE AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NATURE OF MAN . .	11
4. DIFFERENTIATION OF CULTURAL AND PSY- CHOLOGICAL FACTORS	16
5. THE OVEREMPHASIS OF THE BIOLOGICAL FACTOR	29
6. SOME SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS REEXAMINED .	40

PART II

SOCIAL EVOLUTION

1. CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION . .	56
2. THE BIOLOGICAL FACTOR AND THE CULTURAL FACTOR IN SOCIAL CHANGE	61
3. EARLY RECORDS OF CULTURAL DEVELOP- MENT	66
4. THE CUMULATIVE NATURE OF MATERIAL CULTURE AND ITS DIVERSIFICATION .	73
5. INVENTIONS, MENTAL ABILITY AND CUL- TURE	80

	A LIST OF SOME INVENTIONS AND DISCOVERIES MADE INDEPENDENTLY BY TWO OR MORE PERSONS	90
6.	THE RATE OF CULTURAL GROWTH	103
7.	BIOLOGICAL CHANGE IN MAN	118
8.	THE CORRELATION OF CULTURAL AND BIOLOGICAL CHANGE	130

PART III

CULTURAL INERTIA AND CONSERVATISM

1.	VARIOUS CONCEPTIONS OF THE PERSISTENCE OF CULTURE	146
2.	SURVIVALS	150
3.	THE UTILITY OF CULTURE	154
4.	DIFFICULTIES OF INVENTION AND OF DIFFUSION	159
5.	VESTED INTERESTS	166
6.	THE POWER OF TRADITION	170
7.	HABIT	173
8.	SOCIAL PRESSURE	180
9.	FORGETTING THE UNPLEASANT	186
10.	PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS AND CONSERVATISM	190

PART IV

SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENTS

1.	THE HYPOTHESIS OF CULTURAL LAG	200
2.	VERIFICATION BY THE FACTS OF WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION FOR ACCIDENTS	213
3.	ILLUSTRATIONS: TAXATION, FAMILY, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, TRADE UNIONS, REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT, PUEBLO DWELLERS	237
4.	REASONS FOR CULTURAL LAG	256

5.	CORRELATION BETWEEN PARTS OF CULTURE	265
6.	MATERIAL CULTURE AS A SOURCE OF MOD- ERN SOCIAL CHANGES	268

PART V

ADJUSTMENT BETWEEN HUMAN NATURE AND CULTURE

1.	THE THEORY OF THE CAVE MAN IN THE MODERN CITY	284
2.	EVIDENCE OF LACK OF ADJUSTMENT: NERV- OUSNESS AND INSANITY	312
3.	EVIDENCE OF LACK OF ADJUSTMENT: SOCIAL PROBLEMS	331
4.	CHANGING HUMAN NATURE VERSUS CON- TROLLING SOCIAL EVOLUTION	336
5.	SUGGESTIONS FOR BETTER ADJUSTMENTS .	346

PART I

THE SOCIAL HERITAGE AND THE ORIGINAL NATURE OF MAN

I

SOCIAL HERITAGE

When a child is born into the world he is born into a natural environment, a heritage of nature. This is true of all animals. But man is born also into a social heritage.¹ This is a heritage that does not devolve upon a particular individual, in the manner in which a man inherits a piece of property. This heritage is social and is common in general to all the children born into a particular group. It is also called social heritage because it is the product of human society, the results of many social achievements during the ages that man has been on the earth. It differs from a heritage from nature such as land, water, air, vegetation, animals, in that the social heritage is the product of human social endeavor and is not the gift of nature, untouched by the hand of man. A group of new-born infants on an island uninhabited by man would be without a social heritage, although, like the lower animals, they would

¹ Graham Wallas, *Our Social Heritage*.

be born into a natural environment. The social heritage is therefore not coextensive with environment. The environment of man may be said to consist of two parts: natural environment, including air, heat, land, water, soil, moisture, vegetation and minerals; and the social heritage, consisting of buildings, technological equipment, social organization, language, the arts, philosophies, science, religions, morals and customs.

The social heritage is very similar in meaning to the word, culture, as used by sociologists and anthropologists. Culture has been defined by Tylor as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."² In this definition of culture the use of material objects is not particularly emphasized, and there is a tendency to think of culture as somewhat removed from material objects. However, the use of material things is a very important part of the culture of any people. A special term, material culture, is frequently used, giving particular emphasis to the material features of culture. The word, culture, properly includes, as does the term, social heritage, both the material culture and also such parts of culture as knowledge, belief, morals, law, and custom. To enumerate in detail the

² E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. I, p. 1.

variegated subject matter of culture or the social heritage would include a very long list indeed; such an enumeration would comprise all the diverse parts of "that complex whole" of which Tylor speaks. The social institutions or organizations are very important parts of culture, as truly as the other parts that have been specially mentioned.

The concept, civilization, is very closely related in meaning to the concept, culture. Civilization is used in a number of different ways. To some it means certain finer, choicer, and more spiritual or moral achievements of mankind and is thus contrasted with barbarism or savagery. Civilization is also used by some writers to refer to the conditions of society where it is organized on a civil basis as contrasted to a kinship basis. Civilization may also be thought of as "that complex whole" in its recent stage of development. If culture be looked at historically then civilization is the late phase of culture, in other words, modern culture.

This conception has been further described by Herbert Spencer as the superorganic. Spencer conceived of a time when there was no life on the earth; all was inorganic.³ Then followed the inorganic and based upon it came the organic, and this organic developed through an evolutionary

³ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, Vol. I, Chap. I.

process to its highest product, man. Finally, following man and based upon man came the superorganic, and this superorganic is also developing, he said, through the process of evolution. These processes, the inorganic, the organic and the superorganic, are all interrelated and based one upon the other. Very probably the superorganic began with man or shortly after man evolved. It may be that some of the higher animals have something like the beginnings of a superorganic. For instance, certain learned tendencies may be passed down from one generation to another by animals as a sort of rudimentary social heritage. Thus birds may learn to sing a certain note from another bird. The question as to the time of origin of the superorganic, or whether the higher animals other than man possess it, may be of great importance for some problems of science, but the solution of this question is not of great significance for the purposes of the present analysis. The terms, the superorganic, social heritage, and culture, have all been used interchangeably.

The social heritage is different in different localities, with different peoples and in different eras. It also grows or decays, and no doubt there are definite processes describing its change. The causes of this variation and growth are of

greatest interest, but our first purpose must be to differentiate certain concepts.

2

THE ORIGINAL NATURE OF MAN

Man as we see him and know him is always a product of two factors, heredity and environment. The contribution of heredity to this product we call original nature. The fertilized ovum carries the determinants of what will later be his original nature. The germ cell develops into an individual with definite anatomical and physiological characteristics. It determines, for example, whether the individual will be blond or brunette, male or female, large-boned or small-boned. But of the total biological equipment developed from the fertilized cell, we are interested primarily in that part of his endowment which is the subject matter of the study of psychology. The line of demarcation between physiological and psychological behavior is not clear-cut, but certain parts of the body, such as certain glands and the nervous system appear to be more intimately and conspicuously related to the behavior found in social phenomena. So we shall use the term original nature

[7]