

SOCIAL PROCESS

BY

CHARLES HORTON COOLEY

PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1918

**COPYRIGHT, 1918, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS**

Published September, 1918



CONTENTS

PART I—THE ORGANIC VIEW OF THE PROCESS OF HUMAN LIFE

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE TENTATIVE METHOD	3
II. ORGANIZATION	19
III. CYCLES	30
IV. CONFLICT AND CO-OPERATION	35
V. PARTICULARISM VERSUS THE ORGANIC VIEW	43

PART II—PERSONAL ASPECTS OF SOCIAL PROCESS

VI. OPPORTUNITY	55
VII. SOME PHASES OF CULTURE	67
VIII. OPPORTUNITY AND CLASS	78
IX. THE THEORY OF SUCCESS	88
X. SUCCESS AND MORALITY	99
XI. FAME	112
XII. THE COMPETITIVE SPIRIT	125
XIII. THE HIGHER EMULATION	137
XIV. DISCIPLINE	144

PART III—DEGENERATION

XV. AN ORGANIC VIEW OF DEGENERATION	153
XVI. DEGENERATION AND WILL	169
XVII. SOME FACTORS IN DEGENERATE PROCESS	180

CONTENTS

PART IV—SOCIAL FACTORS IN BIOLOGICAL SURVIVAL

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXVIII. PROCESS, BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL	197
XIX. SOCIAL CONTROL OF THE SURVIVAL OF TYPES	209
XX. ECONOMIC FACTORS; THE CLASSES ABOVE POVERTY	218
XXI. POVERTY AND PROPAGATION	226

PART V—GROUP CONFLICT

XXII. GROUP CONFLICT AND MODERN INTEGRATION	241
XXIII. SOCIAL CONTROL IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	255
XXIV. CLASS AND RACE	268

PART VI—VALUATION

XXV. VALUATION AS A SOCIAL PROCESS	283
XXVI. THE INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTER OF PECUNIARY VALUATION	293
XXVII. THE SPHERE OF PECUNIARY VALUATION	309
XXVIII. THE PROGRESS OF PECUNIARY VALUATION	329

PART VII—INTELLIGENT PROCESS

XXIX. INTELLIGENCE IN SOCIAL FUNCTION	351
XXX. THE DIVERSIFICATION AND CONFLICT OF IDEAS	363
XXXI. PUBLIC OPINION AS PROCESS	378
XXXII. RATIONAL CONTROL THROUGH STANDARDS	382
XXXIII. SOCIAL SCIENCE	395
XXXIV. THE TENTATIVE CHARACTER OF PROGRESS	405
XXXV. ART AND SOCIAL IDEALISM	410
INDEX	423

PART I

**THE ORGANIC VIEW OF THE PROCESS
OF HUMAN LIFE**

CHAPTER I

THE TENTATIVE METHOD

ADAPTIVE GROWTH—PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL FORMS—IMPERSONAL FORMS ARE ALIVE—INTERMEDIATE FORMS—THE TENTATIVE PROCESS—ILLUSTRATIONS OF TENTATIVE GROWTH—ORGANIC TENDENCY—THE KINDLING OF MIND

WE see around us in the world of men an onward movement of life. There seems to be a vital impulse, of unknown origin, that tends to work ahead in innumerable directions and manners, each continuous with something of the same sort in the past. The whole thing appears to be a kind of growth, and we might add that it is an *adaptive* growth, meaning by this that the forms of life we see—men, associations of men, traditions, institutions, conventions, theories, ideals—are not separate or independent, but that the growth of each takes place in contact and interaction with that of others. Thus any one phase of the movement may be regarded as a series of adaptations to other phases.

That the growth of persons is adaptive is apparent to every one. Each of us has energy and character, but not for an hour do these develop except by communication and adjustment with the persons and conditions about us. And the case is not different with a social group, or with the ideas which live in the common medium of communicative thought. Human life is thus all one growing whole, unified by ceaseless currents of interaction, but at the same time differentiated into those

SOCIAL PROCESS

diverse forms of energy which we see as men, factions, tendencies, doctrines, and institutions.

The most evident distinction among these growing forms is that between the personal and the impersonal. A man is a personal form of life; a fashion or a myth is impersonal. This seems obvious enough, but there are cases in which the line is not so plain, and it may be well to consider more precisely what we mean by "personal" in this connection, or rather in just what sense a form of human life can be impersonal.

An impersonal form, I should say, is one whose life history is not identified with that of particular persons. A myth, for example, has a history of its own which you would never discover in the biography of individuals, and although it exists in the minds of men it cannot be seen intelligibly except by regarding it as a distinct whole for which human thought is only a medium. When an American Indian, let us say, repeated with unconscious variations the story of Hiawatha, he did not know he was participating in the growth of a myth; that was taking place in and through him but quite apart from his personal consciousness. The same is true of the growth of language. We know that the speech of any people has a vital unity, offering to the philologist a world of interesting structures and relations of which those who use the language and contribute to its growth are as unaware as they are of the physiology of their bodies. The difference between personal and impersonal organisms, then, is above all practical, resting upon the fact that many forms of life are not identified with personality and cannot be understood, can hardly be seen at all, by one who will interest himself only in persons.

THE TENTATIVE METHOD

They exist in the human mind, but to perceive them you must study this from an impersonal standpoint.

Observe the practical value, if we hope to do away with war, of perceiving that the chief opponent of peace is something far more than any one group of men, like the Prussian aristocracy, namely militarism, an international organism existing everywhere in the form of aggressive ideals, traditions, and anticipations. If we can learn to see this, and see how we ourselves, perhaps, are contributing to it by our ignorance of foreign nations and our lack of generous ideals for our own, we are in a position to oppose it effectually.

We live, in fact, in the very midst of a rank growth of social structures of which, since they are impersonal and do not appeal to our interest in personality, we are mainly unaware. We can see that such a growth has taken place in the past, and there is no reason to suppose that it has ceased. The development of religious institutions during the past thirty years has involved gradual changes in belief about such matters as immortality, salvation, and the relation of God to man, of which we have not been aware because they have not been the work of definite thought and discussion, for the most part, but have been borne in upon us by the mental currents of the time. We do not even now know precisely what they are; but they are real and momentous, and it is of such changes that the development of institutions chiefly consists.

It is noteworthy that however impersonal a phase of social growth may be it appeals to our interest as soon as we see that it has a life history, as one may find amusement in following the history of a word in one of the books of etymology. There is something in the course of any sort of life that holds our attention

SOCIAL PROCESS

when we once get our eye upon it. How willingly do we pursue the histories of arts, sciences, religions, and philosophies if some one will only show us how one thing grows out of another.

To say that a social form is impersonal does not mean that it is dead. A language or a myth is verily alive; its life is human life; it has the same flesh and blood and nerves that you and I have, only the development of these is organized along lines other than those of personal consciousness. When I speak, or even when I think, language lives in me, and the part that lives in me is acting upon other parts living in other persons, influencing the life of the whole of which I am unconscious. And the same may be said of tradition, of the earlier and less conscious history of institutions, and of many obscure movements of contemporary life which may prove important notwithstanding their obscurity.

It is evident that the personal and the impersonal forms must overlap, since the same life enters into both. If you took away all the persons there would be nothing left, the other systems would be gone too, because their constituents are the same. What we may not so readily admit (because of our special interest in personality) is that persons are equally without a separate existence, and that if you take away from a man's mind all the unconscious and impersonal wholes there would be nothing left—certainly no personality. The withdrawal of language alone would leave him without a human self.

Between persons, on the one hand, and those forms of life that are wholly impersonal, on the other, there are many intermediate forms that have something of both

characteristics. A family is perhaps as personal as any group can be, because its members so commonly identify their personality with it, but it may easily have an organic growth of its own to which its members contribute without knowing. Every family has in greater or less degree a moral continuity from generation to generation through which we inherit the influence of our great grandfathers, and there is none of which a history might not be written, as well as of the Stuarts or Hohenzollerns, if we thought it worth while.

A small, closely knit community, like a primitive clan, or like a Jewish colony in a Russian village, has a corporate life of much the same personal character as the family; that is, the group comprehends almost the whole personality of the individuals, and is not too large or too complex for the individual to comprehend the group. Larger communities and even nations are also thought of as aggregates of persons, but they have a life history that must be seen as a whole and can never be embraced in any study of persons as such.

Most of the voluntary associations of our modern life are of a character chiefly impersonal; that is they tend to a specialization by which one interest of the individual is allied with the similar interests of others, leaving his personality as a whole outside the group. The ordinary active citizen of our day joins a dozen or more organizations, for profit, for culture, for philanthropy, or what-not, into each of which he puts only a fragment of himself, and for which he feels no serious responsibility. It is very commonly the case, however, that one or a few individuals—zealous employees or unpaid enthusiasts for the cause—do identify themselves with the life of the association and put personality into it. And this may

SOCIAL PROCESS

happen with those social growths which we have noticed as peculiarly impersonal—even with language, as when an enthusiast sets out to revive Irish or promote Volapük.

May we not say, indeed, that whenever two persons associate we have a new whole whose life cannot altogether be understood by regarding it merely as the sum of the two? This is clearly the case with husband and wife, and no doubt, in measure, with other relations.

If we inquire more closely into the interaction and growth of these forms of life we come upon what I will call the tentative process. This is no other than what is vaguely known to popular thought as the process of evolutionary "selection," or the survival of the fittest, and is also described as the method of trial and error, the pragmatic method, the growth of that which "works" or functions, and by other terms similar to these. Perhaps as simple a description as any is to say that it is a process of experiment which is not necessarily conscious. That is, the trial of various activities and the guidance of behavior by the result of the trial may require no understanding of what is taking place.

The growth of social forms is for the most part roughly analogous to that of the wild-grape vine which has extended itself over trellises and fences and into trees in my back yard. This vine has received from its ancestry a certain system of tendencies. There is, for example, the vital impulse itself, the general bent to grow. Then there is its habit of sending out straight, rapidly growing shoots with two-branched tendrils at the end. These tendrils revolve slowly through the air, and when one touches an obstacle, as a wire or branch, it hooks itself about it and draws up in the form of a spiral spring,

THE TENTATIVE METHOD

pulling the shoot up after it. A shoot which thus gets a hold grows rapidly and sends out more tendrils; if it fails to get a hold it by and by sags down and ceases to grow. Thus it feels its way and has a system of behavior which insures its growth along the line of successful experiment.

So in the human world we find that forms of life tending to act in certain ways come into contact with situations which stimulate some of their activities and repress others. Those that are *stimulated increase*, this increase acts upon the structures involved in it—usually to augment their growth—and so a “selective” development is set in motion. Intelligence may have a part in this or it may not; nothing is essential but active tendencies and conditions which guide their operation.

You may sometimes see one vine growing upon another, involving the mutual adaptation of two living forms. In human life this is the usual condition, the environment being not something fixed but another plastic organism, interacting in turn with still other organisms, giving rise to an endless system of reciprocal growth. One form of life feels about among the various openings or stimuli offered by another, and *responds to those which are most congruous with its own tendencies*. The two experiment with each other and discover and develop some way, more or less congenial, of getting along. This is evidently true of persons, and the principle applies equally to groups, ideas, and institutions.

We have, at any given moment, a complex of personal and impersonal wholes each of which is charged with energy and tendency in the form of heredity and habit coming from its past. If we fix our attention upon any particular whole—a person, a party, a state, a doctrine,

SOCIAL PROCESS

a programme of reform, a myth, a language—we shall find it in the act of making its way, of growing if it can, in the direction of its tendencies. As we have seen, it is alive, however impersonal, and has human flesh, blood, and nerves to urge it on. It already has adapted structure—hands and feet as Luther said of the Word of God—because if it had not developed something of the sort, some fitness to live in the general stream of human life, we should not in fact find it there. As its means of further growth it has a repertory of available activities; and these, consciously or otherwise, are tried upon the situation. If not guided by something in the nature of intelligence they act blindly, and may nevertheless act effectively. In general some one or some combination of these activities will work better in the situation than others, finding more scope or stimulus of some sort, and will grow accordingly; the energies of the whole, so far as they are available, tending to find an outlet at this point. Thus the more a thing works the more it is enabled to work, since the fact that it functions draws more and more energy to it. And the whole to which it belongs, in thus continuing and enhancing the successful activity, behaves very much as if it were conducting a deliberate experiment. The enhanced activity also involves changes in the whole and in the situation at large; and thus we move on to new situations and new operations of the same principle.

Take, for illustration, the growth of a man at any point of his career; let us say a youth starting out to make his living. He has energies and capacities of which he is for the most part but vaguely aware. Young people wave their instincts and habits about for something to

THE TENTATIVE METHOD

catch on very much as a vine does its tendrils. Suggestions as to possible lines of work, drawn from what he sees about him, are presented to his mind and, considering these with such light as he may have, he seeks a job. He selects as among his opportunities, and at the same time his opportunities, in the form of possible employers, select as between him and other seekers. Having undertaken a job he may find that he cannot do the work, or that it is too repugnant to his inclinations, in which case he presently drops it and tries another. But if he succeeds and likes it his energy more and more flows into it, his whole mind is directed toward it, he grows in that sense. And his success usually secures to him a larger and larger part to play in his chosen field, thus opening new opportunities for growth in the same direction. Life is constantly revealing openings which we could not have anticipated. It is like paddling toward the outlet of a lake, which you cannot locate until you are almost in it. We think that our course must extend in one of two directions; but further advance shows that there is a third more practicable than either. A little idea that we have overlooked or deemed insignificant often grows until it renders obsolete those we thought great.

In the case of a group under personal leadership the process is not greatly different. A political party, a business enterprise, a social settlement, a church, a nation, develops by means of a mixture of foresight and unforeseen experience. It feels its way, more or less intelligently, until it finds an opening, in the form of policies that prove popular, unexploited markets, neglected wrongs, more timely doctrines, or the like; and then, through increased activity at the point of success, develops in the propitious direction.

SOCIAL PROCESS

Fashion well illustrates the tentative growth of an impersonal form. Thus fashions in women's dress are initiated, it appears, at Paris, this city having a great prestige in the matter which it has achieved by some centuries of successful leadership. In Paris there are a large number of professional designers of dress who are constantly endeavoring to foresee the course of change, and to produce designs that will "take." They compete with one another in this, and those who succeed gain wealth and reputation for themselves and the commercial establishments with which they are connected. Although they initiate they by no means have the power to do this arbitrarily, but have to adapt themselves to vague but potent tendencies in the mind of their public. It is their business to divine these and to produce something which will fit the psychological situation. At the seasons when new styles are looked for the rival artists are ready with their designs, which they try upon the public by causing professional models, actresses, or other notabilities to appear in them. Of the many so presented only a few come into vogue, and no designer can be certain of success: no one can surely foresee what will work and what will not. But the designs that win in Paris spread almost without opposition over the rest of the fashionable earth.

In the sphere of ideas "working" is to be understood as the enhanced thought which the introduction of an idea into the mental situation may stimulate. An idea that makes us think, especially if we think fruitfully, is a working idea. In order to do this it must be different from the ideas we have, and yet cognate enough to suggest and stimulate a synthesis. When this is the case the human mind, individual or collective, is impelled to exert itself in order to clear the matter up and find an

THE TENTATIVE METHOD

open way of thinking and acting. Thus it strives on to a fresh synthesis, which is a step in the mental growth of mankind.

Consider, for example, the working of the idea of evolution, of the belief that the higher forms of life, including man, are descended from lower. A pregnant, widely related idea of this sort has a complex growth which is ever extending itself by selection and adaptation. We know that various lines of study had united, during the earlier half of the nineteenth century, to make it appear to bold thinkers that evolution from lower forms was not improbable. This idea found a point of fruitful growth when, in the thought of Darwin especially, it was brought into contact with the geological evidence of change and with the knowledge of heredity and variation accumulated by breeders of domestic species. Here it worked so vigorously that it drew the attention and investigation first of a small group and later of a great part of the scientific thought of the time. Other ideas, like that of Malthus regarding the excess of life and the struggle for existence, were co-ordinated with it, new researches were undertaken; in short, the public mind began to function largely about this doctrine and has continued to do so ever since.

Just what is it that "works"? The idea implies that there is already in operation an active tendency of some sort which encounters the situation and whose character determines whether it will work there, and if so, how. In the case of the vine it is the pre-existing tendency of the tendrils to revolve in the air, to bend themselves about any object they may meet, and then to draw together like a spiral spring, which causes the vine to work as it does when it meets the wire. Indeed, to explain