

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

A NEW APPROACH TO STUDIES OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY

THORNE DEUEL

President, Illinois State Academy of Science

When I began some months ago to draft an outline for this paper, I was already engaged in writing a booklet in the *Story of Illinois* series of the Museum, called "Man's Venture in Culture" with the subtitle "Some Inventions Underlying Modern Civilization in Illinois." Work on this pamphlet set in motion a train of thought and raised questions that, I suppose, have always puzzled students of man. How was man launched on his cultural and social career and, once started, what kept him on the road? Is culture haphazard and erratic? Is it, as Professor Lowie once said, "a thing of shreds and patches"? Or does it have direction and meaning?

If I seem dogmatic, I hope you will consider that my statements are always qualified by the phrases "in my opinion" or "it seems to me."

The talk you will hear is selected from a larger paper and will consist of three parts:

- (1) A broad hypothesis of cultural and social evolution.
- (2) A brief survey of man's essential needs and his means of satisfying them as a starting point for studies in culture and society.
- (3) A comparison of the means used to satisfy the same need in a simple culture and in the United States today.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

For several hundred years, philosophers, historians, and, more lately, scientists have observed, experimented, and amassed vast amounts of data about man, his psychological nature, his cultural and social achievements. The resulting conclusions, even where they deal with significant data, have been disappointing. Consideration of this state of affairs seems to indicate a need for a new approach to the sciences concerned.

It seems almost obvious after considerable reflection on the subject that man's existence may be divided into four periods or stages of cultural and social development, each bounded or limited at beginning and end by a discovery and invention series. Whether or not the individual should be considered as man or wild animal in the first stage is outside this presentation.

Whether or not he should be considered a man in the first stage, he *did* learn to stand up on his hind legs, to walk about in the upright position, to use his hands (instead of his jaws) to seize food and to convey it to his mouth, to throw stones and hit with sticks in self-protection or aggression, and finally to crack rocks and break sticks so that they would better serve his purposes.

Finally he hit upon a discovery—the realization that if he struck a piece of flint in a certain way with a small boulder he always got the same result, a shell-shaped (conchoidal) scar on the rock mass or core. He next visualized how to make a weapon of a certain shape by using his discovery, possibly years afterward, though I am inclined to believe the invention followed close upon the discovery. At any rate he eventually invented a chipped stone tool the type of which was copied again and again. Archaeologists recognize some of his improved types of early stone tool as a fist axe or a chopper.

I shall follow him briefly through the second stage in which he became a family man, learned to talk, and formed loosely knit societies with other men, hunted animals with groups of his fellows, until finally the woman discovered how to grow food plants at home and the man to bring up young animals found during the hunt, to tame and breed them in captivity.

This led man into the age of food production where the family raised their own grain and meat, which was thereby generally more plentiful and certain. He could support larger families than before and live in villages, where he now needed to co-operate with his neighbors and to devise a means of regulating the conduct of families thus living side by side. It was probably the man who had the idea of hitching the bullock or cow to the digging stick that the woman used and thus invented the plow. Over the centuries that followed, food production was accelerated, cities grew, and government and religion became complicated. Man learned to hitch the ox to the mill to grind his corn, or to a

wheel to lift water from the river to his fields. The latter part of this stage we usually call ancient history.

Shortly before the beginning of the Christian era man made his third key discovery—that a wheel turned by the power of water could be hitched to his mill and do more and better work than his tame animals. Roughly this coincides with the beginning of Mediaeval and Modern History. I shall not go into the changes that have taken place since that discovery; they are fully described in histories. And it is well known that atomic energy is the latest source of inanimate power man has attempted to harness to the machine.

To summarize, there have been, if my hypothesis is correct, three key discovery-inventions: (1) the discovery that stone could be regularly chipped or flaked and thus tools be made of useful, specialized shape, (2) that plants and food-draft animals could be bred and raised successfully in artificial surroundings, and (3) that inanimate power could be harnessed to machines to do work man had never dreamed of doing before.

The four stages can be called: (1) the brute or pre-cultural stage, (2) the stage of man's self-domestication, (3) the stage of food production, and (4) the machine age or stage of mass production.

MAN'S ESSENTIAL NEEDS

Now let us look at some of man's needs which we can, I believe, agree upon as essential or basic needs. We shall have to disregard, perhaps, for the time being some of our standards of value that we have learned to consider significant. Possibly some of them may be the means of satisfying needs (and not very important ones

at that) rather than actual needs. It may help us in our attempts to separate needs from the means of satisfying them to consider a principle generally accepted among social anthropologists: a going cultural and social group continues to so exist because it provides the

means of satisfying the essential needs of the individuals of that group.

The basic needs of man in a cultural and social world and some of the means of satisfying those needs at one period or another of his existence are listed in table I.

TABLE I.

<i>Basic Needs</i>	<i>Means of Satisfying Needs</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individual security. 2. The opportunity for the individual to develop and fit himself into his surroundings. 3. Lineage and group continuation. 4. Regulation of individuals within groups, and of groups with individuals and other groups. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pursuits that permit individuals to secure food, water, air, sunlight, housing, clothing. Magic, religion, ethics, science, technology, values, law, order, philosophy and ethics. 2. Curiosity and cautiousness, play activities, education, experience, professional and technical training, clubs, societies, associations, art, literature, theatre, and similar pursuits. 3. Marriage and marriage customs. 4. Custom, law, government.

The first three of these are equally the needs of all living things, the last seems to apply to the so-called gregarious and social animals. However, the cultural and social means of satisfying man's needs appear to be of a different kind, possibly best expressed by saying that they exist chiefly on a cultural and social level as against the purely instinctive level of non-cultural animals. Accompanying the needs and the means taken to satisfy them—in fact, the chain on which the needs (instinct or tendency to act) and the means (action or behavior) are strung—is the healthy activity or functioning of the nervous organization. These needs and, to a greater or lesser degree, the identification and acceptance of the means to satisfy them lie in the nervous and physical structure that offspring inherit from

their ancestral lineage through their parents. In the multiplicity of details (important to the individual on account of his standards of values concerning his cultural and social surroundings, though not necessarily significant in the eyes of his group or to cultural and social evolution), the means differ widely.

You may think of other needs, but I believe you will agree that those proposed are essential to man today in his world. Individuals, of course, may exist who apparently disregard certain of the basic needs but they are overwhelmingly in the minority and are not important for our discussion nor in cultural evolution.

A MEANS OF SOCIAL REGULATION

Let us now take a basic need of man and one of the means devised

or invented to satisfy it—the need and means for regulation and guidance. We could equally well have chosen another need and the corresponding means of satisfying it. Whenever the domestication of plants and/or animals was discovered or wherever the invention was learned and put to use by man, sooner or later a number of families gathered and formed communities. Man as a member of such groups found it to the advantage of himself and his family to have a simple regulatory system to give security and equal rights to all families in the village and to protect them from outsiders. Without going into the history of governmental forms, I believe we can classify them all into two broad types, which may be called *the rule of the majority* and *the rule of the minority*. The governments of the United States, Great Britain, and Switzerland belong to the first class; the ancient oriental and mediaeval kingdoms and empires, Russia, and “dictated republics” to the second. It is beside the point to discuss here the relative merits of the two types. From an anthropological standpoint, whichever one works satisfactorily for a group is for that people at that time a healthful way of satisfying their need in this respect.

On account of our interest and general acceptance of its value in the United States, we shall consider here government by the majority or democracy. From our knowledge of man from history and ethnology, it is probable that the earliest villages were governed by a council of all the citizens meeting in assembly. Similar communities in the same cultural stage exist today. Their citizens’ councils bear a close resemblance to the New England town meeting. If

we examine the significant features of these early third or food production stage democracies we find:

The citizens assemble at the announcement of messengers, or perhaps a town crier announces through the streets the business to come before the assembly. The citizens meet at the appointed hour. A chairman, elected for the purpose, or possibly for the year, calls the meeting to order, puts or calls upon others to put each item of business before the gathering. All citizens are permitted to speak freely about the matter, whether they favor or oppose the issue. At the end of the discussion of each question, a *viva voce* vote is called, first those in favor saying “aye,” then those against it saying “no.” It was a simple matter to decide, according to the volume of response, which side had won as long as opinion was heavily weighted one way or the other. It was impossible to decide when the assemblies were large and almost evenly divided on an issue, for these early people were unable to count. When villages grew into cities or became countries with considerable outlying territory, these simple democracies were unable to survive and minority rule of the kingship type became the order in western and southern Asia and northern Africa, and later in Europe and most of Africa.

If we were to study the Greek city-states, the Roman and the Swiss republics, we would see how these difficulties of regulating dense populations and extensive territories were gradually overcome and government by the people made practicable under changed conditions. However, let us look at our own United States (table IIb). We in the United States of America believe our form of regu-

TABLE II.

a. <i>Primitive Village</i>	b. <i>United States</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The citizens of the village are the governing power, that is they make laws, arrange for their enforcement, punish violators and defend their community. 2. The village assembly consisting of all citizens performs the functions of an executive, legislative, and judicial nature, and elect a leader during emergencies. 3. The assembly elects a leader to act temporarily for the village in a crisis. He vacates his office and duties when the emergency is over. 4. Information is freely exchanged among villagers. Issues are discussed on the floor of the assembly. Minority views are heard equally with all variations of opinion, without restraint or threat of injury. 5. Decisions of the assembly are arrived at by <i>viva voce</i> voting of qualified voters regardless of which side of the issue they take. Views of the majority are accepted by all and carried out. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The citizens of the country are the governing power or the source of that power. Men and women over 21 years of age and mentally competent are citizens. 2. In general the citizens elect by ballot officers and members of legislative and judicial bodies to act for them by performing executive, legislative, judicial, and defense functions in accordance with the general wishes of the electing citizens for a definitely limited term of office. These officers and representatives are responsible to the citizens electing them whether or not they so think and act. 3. The powers of certain offices are expanded and/or new officers are appointed in an emergency, for its duration only, after which these powers and offices are reduced again to their usual peacetime limitations. 4. Information untampered with by those temporarily exercising the governing functions is communicated to the citizens by means of newspapers, radio, books, magazines, and other means, so all sides of issues may be known, including international relationships, domestic issues and happenings, and scientific discoveries. 5. Decisions are secured in the different governing bodies and the elections by <i>viva voce</i> voting or balloting of all qualified voters attending the polls or duly authorized meetings. The minority votes without fear of injury or restraint and the will of majority is accepted by all and carried out.

lating and guiding people's conduct to be as good as, or perhaps a little better than, any other form of control in the world.

There are differences between the tremendously complex organization of government by the majority in the United States today and the very simple democratic form back in western Asia nine or ten thousand years ago. I believe it is not difficult to explain those differences between the two political units in terms of

population density, extent of territory, modern complexity of the technological devices and the diversities of the social organization and of thought. Comparing the corresponding features of the two democracies:

(1) The first item is essentially the same in both simple and representative democracies (the governing power rests with the citizens).

(2) In our United States, government by representation is neces-

sary (we know no substitute) because of the enormous number of people and the vast extent of territory involved. How citizens are considered qualified is not very important as long as it is done on a reasonable basis and is acceptable to the group.

(3) In the primitive democracy the headman, or someone elected by the assembly of citizens, would take over in an emergency. In modern democracies it is simpler to increase the powers of officers already functioning although additional officers are also appointed for special work not considered necessary in ordinary times.

(4) Methods of communicating information have changed enormously since the early village democracies through technological inventions, but our present methods serve the same purpose of getting the news promptly to the citizens, now numbering in the millions and scattered over millions of square miles.

(5) Voting *viva voce*, by ballot or by balloting machines, today takes advantage of technological inventions to insure accuracy of results, to speed up the "returns" from millions of people over a wide area. The purpose is still to determine the will of the majority of the citizens, which is accepted by all.

Let me see if I can simplify into single phrases each of the parallel items so that one statement may satisfy the essential principles of a democracy at any time.

1. The governing power resides in all the citizens.
2. The local body of citizens directs the regulatory processes either directly or through representatives elected by them. Issues are discussed and voting

on either side of issues is done without fear of injury or threats to intimidate.

3. In times of emergency, officers with special powers may be elected and/or the powers of those in office may be expanded during the crisis only.
4. Information giving both sides of issues is circulated without being colored by officials in office.
5. Each question is decided by the majority of the voters, voting being done in a manner suitable to the conditions of population and territory. The will of the majority is accepted by all.

SUMMARY

Without wishing to belabor my point, it seems to me that a new approach, or a revised approach if you like, is in order in the social sciences.

My proposal is that studies should be made of the essential needs of man and the means of satisfying them in different autonomous cultural and social groups. I suggest the studies be made in the different stages suggested above because I believe such stages exist and are basic in cultural and social evolution. Comparison of suitable (that is, as nearly complete) examples of the means as possible in each stage will, I believe, insure determination of significant features of those means. The significant series of the means satisfying each need in all the stages should be compared again one with another. The result, I believe, in each case will be an identity or near-identity, provided a corresponding means has developed or continued in

each stage considered. The differences, I am confident, will be found in man's increasing means of satisfying his needs, in the changing from one means to another deemed more serviceable, in the changing, over long periods of time, of certain means into needs, and in changes in man's natural and artificial surroundings.

In pursuing the research referred to it will be necessary for the worker

to strip from the means of satisfying the essential needs any nonsignificant features, as one who in reorganizing his attic removes the rubbish.

The two fields of psychology and cultural social studies are, of course, closely linked. Nevertheless, it may be possible, after clearing away some of the confusion, to study the psychological processes separately from the cultural and social processes.