

The Origin of Moral Ideas in Westermarck's Sociology

By Sigemoto Tokoro

Moral sociology is a baby science in Japan. It contains many difficult questions to answer. One of them may be concerned with methodology. But moral sociology does not differ from natural sciences in its practical method. Nevertheless, any moral conduct is so intimate that it is not easy for us to analyze. Westermarck is a Finn, but he owes much to British science and thought. His main works are the following: *The History of Human Marriage*, 1891, 1921; *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 1906, 1912; *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*, 1926. This treatise is the result of my own research into the origin of the moral ideas in his works. I believe there is no book in any language that deals concretely with the evolution of morality on so grand a scale and in so authoritative a way.

The moral concepts are essentially generalizations of the tendencies in certain phenomena calling forth moral emotions. That the moral concepts are ultimately based on emotions either of indignation or of approval, is a fact which thinkers of a certain school have in vain attempted to deny. The terms which embody these concepts must originally be those which have been used —indeed they are still constantly so used— as direct expressions of such emotions with reference to the Phenomena which evoke them.

There are moral emotions of two kinds: disapproval, or indignation, and approval. The moral emotions are retributive emotions, disapproval forming a subspecies of resentment, and approval a subspecies of retributive kindly emotions. Resentment is an aggressive attitude of mind toward a cause of pain. Dr. Steinmetz suggests that revenge is essentially rooted in the feeling of power and superiority, that it is originally "undirected." But among the savage people the revenge is not so indiscriminate as Dr. Steinmetz seems to assume. The collective responsibility is usually involved in the institution of the blood-feud.

Society is the school in which men learn to distinguish between right and wrong. The headmaster is custom, and the lessons are the same for all. Westermarck's sociology is a science of custom, and his ethics is a moral science. The first moral judgments were pronounced in terms of public opinion; both public indignation and public approval are the prototypes of the moral emotions. With regard to the questions of morality, there were in early society, practically no differences of opinion; therefore the character of universality, or objectivity, has been from the very beginning found attached to all the moral judgments. Dr. Steinmetz believes that the vis agens in this long process of evolution lies in the intellectual development of the human race. In another place he observes that revenge directed against the offender is particularly apt to remove the feeling of inferiority, by effectually humiliating the hitherto triumphant foe. But the question is, what evidence can Dr. Steinmetz adduce in support of his theory? Of primitive man we can have no direct experience; no savage people alive can be his faithful representative, either physically or mentally. And yet however greatly the human race has changed, primitive man is not altogether dead. Traits of his character still linger in his descendants; and of the primitive revenge, we are told, there are sufficient survivals left. Not only has Dr. Steinmetz failed to verify his hypothesis that revenge was originally "undirected," but this hypothesis has proved to be quite opposed to all the most probable ideas we can form with regard to the revenge of primitive man.

The statement that an act is good or bad should not merely be attributed to an individual emotion, it always bears reference to an emotion of a more public character. Moral feeling is a social feeling rather than an individual one. Westermarck's sociology is not exactly social psychological.