

ZYGMOND

Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1954).

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ALTRUISTIC ETHICS

Donald T. Campbell's wide-ranging, provocative essay undoubtedly will stimulate several new lines of highly fruitful inquiry in psychology.¹ We agree with one major ramification of Campbell's message—that modern psychology mistakenly treats modern man separated from his social tradition. However, we would like to comment, from an anthropological perspective, on some of his suggestions about the course of social evolution. He makes the following argument: (1) complex urban societies of the past independently but regularly evolved inhibitory moral traditions; (2) these moral norms and transcendent belief systems were remarkably similar to one another; and (3) they probably possessed adaptive functions, particularly the curbing of some aspects of human nature in order to achieve complex social coordination and collective purpose.

There appears to be a good deal of accuracy in Campbell's sketch of specific similarities among complex societies in their ethical systems, especially codes that support strong altruism. He suggests that the common "high-culture" (China, India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Mexico, and Peru) emphasis on altruism is due to the necessity of achieving a greater degree of sociality and social interdependence in the urban setting than is required elsewhere. However, we believe that the available evidence indicates the actual behavior in complex urban societies, in contrast to the norms, to be less altruistic than in simpler societies.² The differentiation of roles beyond the nuclear family, an emphasis on reward for performance, specialization of occupations—all these factors contribute to a more highly developed sense of self and self-seeking than can be found ordinarily in the traditional tribal world. Although in complex societies the level of coordination among individuals and groups is clearly greater than in simpler societies, one would not want to label such behavior "self-sacrificial altruism" when its grounds in calculated and conscious self-interest are evident.

What then are the functions of this ethical code advocating altruistic behavior in complex societies? We would like to identify three possible functions served by the code. First and most obviously, a consistent emphasis on altruism may help to keep in check the heightened egoistic tendencies found in complex societies.

Second, as Campbell has pointed out, an ethical code is a more indirect form of social control than the face-to-face methods such as gossip, scolding, and witchcraft accusations often employed in simpler societies. Urban societies may evolve abstract, highly idealistic codes in part to compensate for the fact that they cannot easily maintain direct interactional overseeing of the

behavior of others, an overseeing usually based on kinship or intimate prior acquaintance.

A third possible function of complex-society altruistic codes may be found in the following considerations. Class and/or caste differences arise in all societies in which an economic surplus of any significant magnitude is generated. Once class or caste is established—that is, once the economic resources of a society are distributed unequally—then full-time governmental and magico-religious specialists emerge as the next steps in the development of sociocultural complexity.³ A Marxist orientation is not necessary to interpret these specialist positions in terms of control systems that help maintain the status quo, one via a legitimized authority resting on coercive powers, the other via the ethical teachings propagated by ecclesiastical authorities. It is no accident that formal religious education is associated with both class stratification and political complexity.⁴ Nonetheless, neither ethical codes nor governmental controls necessarily can prevent change if severe inequities arise in the class/caste system. Great imbalance in rewards can provoke disinclination to participate on the part of those near the bottom of the class structure, and, historically, it has been associated with phenomena such as revolution (e.g., eighteenth-century France), lawlessness (e.g., Rome), and withdrawal from the system (e.g., the Mamprusi kingdom of West Africa and, quite possibly, the Maya). The increasing lack of commitment to today's society noted by Campbell may be partially due to the same factors that have led individuals in many past urban societies to be insufficiently motivated to enter the available societal slots. Where the top 2 percent of the economic pyramid controls one-fourth of the wealth, as in the United States, sharp social change should not come as a surprise. Thus, although Campbell treats altruistic ethical systems as having an evolutionary adaptive value, the "functional truth" that he claims for them must have been of a relatively transient nature because all societies possessing them have changed—and greatly so. Altruistic codes appear to us to be, in part, a commonly invented means of helping preserve wealth and property relations within complex society, but, if the injustice of the distribution becomes great enough, neither the code nor any other device will be likely to prevent the eventual transformation both of property/wealth relations and of society.

Campbell's distinction between the specifically altruistic ethics of complex societies and the moral norms of simple societies, although useful in some respects, might be dropped profitably in favor of an emphasis on the commonalities. Examination of the anthropological data indicates that all sociocultural systems, not just complex ones, have possessed inhibitory moral traditions and transcendent belief systems. For instance, "religious beliefs leading a person to optimize behavior over a longer time than one's own life"⁵ are not confined to complex societies; G. P. Murdock pointed out that eschatology and soul concepts are two of the seventy-three universals that occur in every sociocultural system known to history or ethnography.⁶ The age of such customs is indicated by the association of artifacts with Neanderthal burials of fifty thousand years ago. Murdock's list contains eleven items that directly involve supernaturalistic beliefs and practices, and in general they all function to control and coordinate behavior. Furthermore, the control and coordination of behavior are implicit in the concept of culture itself, which above all assumes sharedness. The source of moral inhibition would seem to lie in the panhuman experience of infant and childhood dependence, a

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period which may lay the foundation for affective ties and social interdependence, most often evidenced by strong bonds of kinship. (The possibility of genetic predispositions for maternal behavior should not be overlooked.) The result appears to be that interaction patterns are characterized by a high degree of reciprocity in all sociocultural systems. Moral norms, "oughts" and "ought nots," arise from these patterned expectations. And these inhibitory moral traditions act to set limits upon individual selfish tendencies in all sociocultural systems.

Having taken issue with part of Campbell's argument, we wish to put the matter in perspective by expressing our admiration of the essay as a whole and by suggesting that the sociobiological orientation advocated by Campbell will come to be adopted by a significant proportion of behavioral scientists.

NOTES

1. Donald T. Campbell, "On the Conflicts between Biological and Social Evolution and between Psychology and Moral Tradition," in this issue.

2. Robert L. Munroe and Ruth H. Munroe, *Cross-cultural Human Development* (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1975); J. W. M. Whiting and B. B. Whiting, "Altruistic and Egoistic Behavior in Six Cultures," *Anthropological Studies* 9 (1973): 56-66; idem, *Children of Six Cultures: A Psycho-cultural Analysis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

3. L. C. Freeman and R. F. Winch, "Societal Complexity: An Empirical Test of a Typology of Societies," *American Journal of Sociology* 62 (1957): 461-66.

4. J. D. Herzog, "Religious Education and Socio-cultural Complexity: A Cross-cultural Study" (paper presented at the meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, November 1961).

5. Campbell.

6. G. P. Murdock, "The Common Denominator of Cultures," in *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, ed. R. Linton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945).

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BEHAVIORAL THEORY, FUNCTIONAL IDEOLOGY, AND MORAL TRADITION

In his presidential address to the American Psychological Association, Donald T. Campbell again has demonstrated impressively that "nature is not organized as universities are."¹ The descriptive and normative significance of such transdisciplinary contributions to behavioral theory as behavioral genetics, sociobiology, and related emerging disciplines is suggested cautiously but imaginatively. Arresting analytical syntheses are revealed in a succession of epigrammatic passages of remarkable power within the "cybernetic reach" of its overarching theoretical framework. Precisely