10-1-1989

Ancestral Voices for a Sociology of Moralities

Vytautus Kavolis
Dickinson College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr

Recommended Citation
In the comparative study of moral cultures, we have been mainly comparing the objects of investigation in search either of universal principles or developmental tendencies holding for all of them, or a clearer understanding of the distinctiveness of particular moral cultures.

But should the comparative project not also include a comparison of the perspectives within which the objects of investigation are being compared? Will the process of investigation not gain depth if we incorporate into its research program the question how the object of investigation appears from the perspectives of various academic disciplines, and how it appears in various historical periods?

I begin to approach these questions through an examination of two European social-scientific studies of moral cultures. The first, History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne, by William Edward Hartpole Lecky, first published in 1869, will represent to us the perspective of the nineteenth-century historian.¹ The second, Morals and Merit: A Study of Values and Social Controls in South Asian Societies, by Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, published almost exactly a hundred years later, in 1967, exhibits the analytical manner of a twentieth-century anthropologist.²

Moral Cultures in 19th-Century Historiography

In the background of the descriptive accounts of the nineteenth-century historian, we discover nine variables that seem sufficiently general to be sought in all civilizations as necessary aspects of their moral cultures.

Lecky suggests a series of empirical relationships in which a particular condition of one of the variables is either an effect of antecedent factors or a cause of identifiable effects. These rela-
tionships are proposed for the Roman empire in the transition from paganism to Christianity, but we might treat them as general hypotheses in social science and ask whether comparable relationships occur within the different overall designs of other civilizations as well; and to what extent these generalizations might apply to our own times.

I will list Lecky’s main variables and adduce some of the empirical relationships of causation and consequence he attaches to them.

1) A moving differentiation between a more “rational” and a more “emotional” orientation toward ethical conduct, the latter associated with an energetic participation of women.

   (a) Calamity promotes an emotionalization of ethics.

   (b) Religion, as contrasted to a secular moral philosophy, produces a preference for cultivation of feeling over rational regulation of action (which presumably a secular philosophy would be more concerned with). 3

   Therefore:

   (c) Calamity can be expected to favor a religious turn in ethics.

2) A moving differentiation between a more ascetic and a more indulgent habit of practice. This dimension seems related, in Troeltschian-Parsonian terms, to the emphasis on the internal “sectarian” integration within the moral culture or its “churchly” adaptation to the external world.

   (a) Both persecution and the luxury of great cities promote the emergence of ascetic tendencies.

3) There will be a stronger or weaker set of moralizing institutions with a capacity to perform one or both of two functions: (a) to develop virtue, (b) to repress vice. Viewed as educational orientations, these functions may be identified as “liberal” (or virtue-expanding) and “fundamentalist” (or virtue-retentive).

   (a) Structural detachment of the representatives of the moralizing institutions from ordinary social participation—e.g., a monastic elite (or its modern equivalents)—produces (a) tenacity of opinions, (b) hatred of dissenters—that is, fanaticism—in the moralist.

   (b) In times of religious persecution, women’s influence has tended to promote atrocity. (Lecky is talking about women who are not active participants in the moralizing institutions but who manipulate sources of political power in societies in which women are generally at a disadvantage. 4 Thus his suggestion, if it holds at
all, may hold for the morally downgraded in general rather than for women specifically.)

(c) The lack of moralizing institutions, occupations, and beliefs does not prevent the highest moral development in particular individuals, but it promotes a general depravity in the mass of people. The “lack of moralizing institutions” is evident when a “chasm” opens up between the “moralists” and the “people,” such as developed in the later Roman empire before Christianity.  

(d) Moralizing agencies which are “more fitted to develop virtue than to repress vice”—that is, in our terms, the more liberal kind of moralizing agencies—produce a greater range of variation between moral excellence and depravity.

It follows that:

(e) Vice repression promotes a greater consistency of moral behavior than do efforts to develop virtues. (Lecky does not say whether the consistency attained by moral despotism does not also preclude highest moral development, but this would seem to be in line with his reasoning.)

(4) There must be in existence either a dominant moral tradition (an integrated complex of ethics and moralizing institutions capable of exerting unchallenged hegemony over moral conduct) or “independent or rival powers” (coexistence of or struggle between alternative moral traditions).

(a) The absence of alternative sources of morality increases the likelihood of moral decay.

(5) One or several more or less coherent doctrinal systems of explanation of evil and prescription for good behavior.

(a) In the evolution of civilization, “sin” is first interpreted as a kind of disease, then as moral transgression. (In advanced industrial societies, we should add, this trend is partly reversed by a movement toward “medicalization of deviance.”)

(b) The doctrine that ideological deviation (or “error”) entails personal guilt promotes persecution.

(6) Moral imagination (images of evil, goodness, and moral perplexity in myth, literature, ritual, the theatre, and the visual arts, which coexist with, but are more or less distinguishable from, and may sometimes even replace, “pure doctrine”).

(a) Images of horrible suffering increase the power of religion over the minds of people more than do appeals to reason.
It follows that:
(b) Moral cultures that have horrifying imagery at their disposal are capable of controlling the masses, and of displacing their competitors, more effectively than moral cultures relying on reason (or on beatific imagery alone).

It further follows that:
(c) Even if its doctrines remain constant, the hold of a moral culture over the masses declines as its use of horrifying imagery declines (presumably because the imagery ceases to be plausible due to such factors as increasing material or political security).

But:
(d) Imagination is less influential on moral character than occupation.

(7) Popular movements seeking to produce changes in moral attitudes and behavior.
(a) In moral movements in which the influence of women is particularly great, "charity of private persons" will be emphasized, and the movement is more likely to spread to the lower classes. The involvement of women promotes compassion and populism.

(8) Degree of activation of the moral energies of the people.
(a) Religion may evoke latent moral energies.
However,
(b) Religion mainly acts by providing the channel for moral enthusiasm rather than generating the moral energies themselves. Since moral energies can express themselves either through patriotism or through religion, they seem to arise either from an intensified experience of social solidarity or from a deepened sense of need for such solidarity, and subside when these experiences or needs become less evident.

(9) Social conditions favorable or unfavorable to acting in accordance with the demands of the moral culture.
(a) Liberty of social action, by releasing ambition, promotes moral behavior in public life; suppression of ambition promotes immorality.
In particular,
(b) Political tyranny and bureaucratic organization of economic activities lead to moral depravity.
(c) Moral indifference to human suffering is supported both by
secular social institutions which allow the infliction of pain on others (such as gladiatorial games, slavery or torture) and by religious practices which require the abandonment of others in search of one's own salvation (such as monastic asceticism, of which the twentieth-century ethic of self-fulfillment is a sort of secular inversion).

(d) Periods of great intellectual enlightenment and great social refinement produce the most anarchic relations between the sexes.

(e) Periods of great intellectual brilliance have "more than once" coincided with those of general depravity.

What is an expression in this theoretical structure of the cultural preoccupations of the author's own times (e.g., the idea of the dangerous woman, the historian's counterpart to the *femme fatale* of the late nineteenth century)? What in the structure of Lecky's theory is cross-culturally valid (e.g., observation that calamity promotes an emotionalization of ethics)? What in his theory can be used in a diagnosis of our times (e.g., his theories of moralizing institutions, moral imagination, and the social conditions of moral action)?

And finally: What is missing in Lecky's approach that other scholars have found important in the study of moral cultures, and what are the theoretical consequences of paying attention or not paying attention to particular analytical elements in the construction of one's explicit or implicit theory of civilizational processes?

*Moral Cultures in 20th-Century Anthropology*

To some extent, Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, in *Morals and Merit*, also speaks about encounters between cultural traditions and processes of change. But the main concern, for the twentieth-century anthropologist, is describing the variety of the symbolic organizations of the moral cultures that currently exist (in his case, on the Indian subcontinent) and that can be directly observed in the practices of living peoples.

Fürer-Haimendorf's main substantive themes are three:

(1) There is an evolutionary stratification of moral cultures within a civilization, with different contemporary groups adhering to moral designs characteristic of different stages of societal evolution.
This generalization subsumes a series of empirical relationships:

(a) The least evolved type of human society, the bands of jungle nomads, have no explicit moral code; only advisory rather than compulsory moral rules; no legal sanctions; no distinction between crimes affecting the whole society and crimes affecting a single individual; and no belief in automatic pollution.

(b) Most preliterate tribes in India have no word for sin; believe that unknowingly performed actions can attract supernatural punishment; the deed, not the intention, counts; supernatural values are not differentiated from tribal custom; moral conduct is conformity to tribal custom.

(c) Both tribal and Hindu societies distinguish between the penalties imposed by society for transgressions against other people and the supernatural punishment following upon offenses to cosmic order, that is, between "secular" and "sacred" systems of moralization.

(d) The notion of socially acquired and recognized merit is common at all evolutionary levels, the notion of merit by inner spiritual achievement of the individual occurs only in some advanced societies in the orbit of Hinduism and Buddhism.

(e) The higher religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, but not most tribal religions, hold that beliefs toward the supernatural influence behavior toward one's fellow humans and reinforce morality.

(f) Moral expectations are not differentiated by sex at the lowest as well as in some religions on the highest levels of sociocultural evolution: in simplest societies and among comparatively sophisticated Buddhists. They are so differentiated at intermediate levels.

The anthropologist's evidence allows us to ask: which elements of morality are common at all levels of societal evolution (e.g., the notion of social merit) and which are specific to particular levels (e.g., the notion of merit by spiritual attainment)? Is there an overall direction of moral evolution or is this perhaps, at least in certain respects, a curvilinear process (e.g., the greater likelihood of moral equality between the sexes at both lowest and highest evolutionary levels)?

(2) The second major theme of the anthropologist—of most interest to us—is that particular religious traditions have differ-
ent effects on moral thinking on similar evolutionary levels and in similar social settings (and that particular ethnic traditions have different effects on the "universal religions").

A variety of empirical relationships are subsumed under this general principle:

(a) Buddhism, but not Hinduism, requires a particular frame of mind as a condition for the effectiveness of ritual practice, "and this view distinguishes even the simple Sherpa farmer from the Naga or Chin who hold that merit is gained merely by sacrificial ritual and the feasting of large crowds, irrespective of the mental state of the donor of the feast" (p. 221).

(b) While the Buddhist is most anxious not to diminish his store of spiritual merit by committing sins, the Hindu is even more anxious to avoid actions which reflect unfavorably on his caste-status and expose him to disapproval by his fellow castemen.

(c) While Buddhism places the interests of society as secondary to the interests of the individual in relation to the supernatural order, Hinduism regards the well-being of the community as more important than does Buddhism. But even a Hindu is morally responsible for his own actions only, not for the state of his society.

(d) While sophisticated Buddhism does not differentiate moral expectations by sex, in high-caste Hinduism and Islam on a similar level of societal evolution different behavior is expected of men and of women.

The main intercivilizational paradigm of Führer-Haimendorf's comparative inquiry distinguishes between freedom-oriented and rule-oriented moralities, a distinction coinciding with that between Christianity and Hinduism, and that between the West and India. Each type of morality is a closed, self-perpetuating, tightly integrated system (in contrast to Lecky's perception of numerous specific interactions constantly going on and changing the actual character of the system over time).

(e) A rule-oriented moral system produces an emphasis on the community, notions of automatic pollution, authoritarian rules which do not require intellectual justification, automatically working purification rites, an absence of guilt-feelings, and the lack of any direct correlation between a person's inner moral quality and his ritual status in society.
(f) A *freedom*-oriented moral system produces an emphasis on the individual conscience, a notion of sin presupposing voluntary assent to evil, rules needing to be justified by reasoning, a repentant state of mind as a necessary condition for cleansing from sin, guilt feelings, and direct correlation between a person's moral quality and his ritual status.

(g) In some less evolved societies on the Indian subcontinent, a *harmony*-oriented moral system exists, in which efforts are made to resolve transgressions by pragmatic compromise, mutual adjustment, and the reequilibration of the community. Such systems are also frequently reported in traditional African societies.

This may well be a more “archaic” kind of morality, based not on any theoretical principle by which literate civilizations tend to operate, but on a practico-emotional attachment to most of one's neighbors or fellow tribesmen, a “public” version of what in modern discourse would be identified as “care.” A substratum of this kind may in ordinary everyday life undergird the more theoretical moral systems of the classical civilizations.

Several questions need to be inserted here. First, would a comparison of the West with China, or of India with China, not have produced somewhat different conceptions of the alternative models of moral systems? More generally: how much of the intellectual structure of the civilization within which comparisons originate—and the tensions which are central to it at a particular point in its history—define the terms in which the comparison is conceived?

Is Fürer-Haimendorf's conception of “freedom” not excessively dependent on what freedom has meant in a Western Christian tradition? Eugene Kamenka writes of a secular “morality of freedom” which "erects no principles and proclaims no obligations; it finds itself in the struggle with evils and not in their suppression."13 This is certainly different from the orthodox Christian morality of freedom.

In both Europe and America since the eighteenth century a "morality in which rules, so predominant in modern conceptions of morality," as contrasted to those of the classical world, has emerged in great strength.14 But is it the same kind of rule morality which Fürer-Haimendorf describes on the basis of Indian models? In India, rules operated to assure adherence to the
nature of the universal process and the requirements of one's particular position in it. In the modern West, they are intended to increase man's mastery, both individually and collectively, over both internal and external environments. Führer-Haimendorf's model of a rule-oriented moral system fits the Soviet Union in its Stalinist phase more consistently than it does western Europe or the U.S., where it applies mainly to the bureaucratized part of the whole, and, in comparison with Japanese bureaucracy, not very strongly even there.

While the Legalist-imperial tradition of China, partly appropriated by the People's Republic, can be fitted into Führer-Haimendorf's rules-oriented type, the Confucian moral culture cannot: it centers on interior cultivation, a state of mind from which an understanding of moral-natural rules follows. Understanding, if sufficiently profound, directly leads to right action, with no potentiality for knowing the right but perversely choosing to do the wrong being recognized. The rules by themselves are sufficient only for "the virtuous peasant," a term of contempt.

This leads to the second question. Are the three models of moral systems cross-civilizationally sufficient? Or should there be added such types as a loyalty-oriented moral system, in which the overriding requirement is faithfulness in personal or group relations (Japan, much of Latin America); and an ecstasy-oriented moral system, in which all rules are invalidated in a search for authenticity of experience (various antinomian, Romantic, and avant-garde movements)?

Third, can a civilization (as distinguished from a "precivilized" society) function for any considerable period of time under the guidance of a single moral system? Should we not rather ask about shifting balances among several moral orientations, each with a different operational logic, not necessarily formalized but implanted in normatively accepted behavior, within any civilization, and certainly within any post-Axial civilization in Karl Jaspers' sense?15

Central to the Indian moral culture has been an oscillation between rule-morality and ecstasy-morality, the alternatives embodied particularly in orthodox Hinduism and in various forms of Tantrism. The native Japanese tradition glorified both loyalty and ecstasy. Both the Islamic world and Judaism recognize a tension between the primary emphasis on rules (binding even
upon God in Judaism, a more arbitrary expression of divine omnipotence in Islam) and freedom in scholarly interpretation and in the mystical movements.

In post-medieval Western Europe, the central conflict has been that between a powerful, though repetitively reversed, thrust toward freedom and the persistence or elaboration of diverse, mutually contradictory varieties of rules. (Freedom is culturally primary here, as rules are in orthodox Judaism and Islam.) In the "avant-garde" culture of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the defining tension has been between freedom and ecstasy (liberalism and romanticism); in the mainstream of twentieth-century America, between freedom and harmony (liberalism and pragmatism). The main contradiction in native African moral cultures, insofar as they have not been influenced by either Islam or Christianity, may be that between harmony and loyalty. And in contemporary Eastern Europe, a conflict between state-Marxist rules and nationalist, religious, and humanistic loyalties prevails.

There is no compelling reason to look for only two alternative moral orientations in a complex civilization. All the basic types of moral orientation that comparative civilizational studies reveal may be found in any advanced (though perhaps not in any archaic) civilization. Differences among civilizations depend on the relative primacy and structural location of each type of moral orientation, the constraints imposed upon it, the resources committed to it, and the relatively durable forms of relationship among alternative moral orientations built into a civilizational tradition. Does one have to choose and reject, or can one adhere to several simultaneously or situationally?

The alternatives may not be embodied in distinct institutions, they may not be equally persistent over time, they may not all be effective in providing guidance in social conduct (e.g., Romanticism tends to energize in the short run, but not to assure a framework for protecting those in need)—but the presence of moral alternatives is important in sustaining the vitality, the biting if painful edge, of a civilization, a potential for revitalization of desiccated standpoints (if this potential is not treated as the danger to be suppressed).

(3) The third major substantive theme of the anthropologist is that the organization of society has a strong, though not an
all-determining, influence in deciding what moral practices will become dominant.

Under this heading are mentioned particular empirical relationships such as the following:

(a) In tribal villages ruled by chiefs there is a tendency toward greater severity of punishment than in the absence of chiefs.
(b) A high emphasis on honor is found in martial societies, where women are underprivileged.
(c) There is a positive correlation between the economic independence of women and their recognition as responsible moral agents judged by standards equally applicable to men.

Fürer-Haimendorf goes on to show that moral orientations are influenced by the evolutionary level of society, ecology, population density, occupation, and the relative economic contributions of participants.

A Comparison of Perspectives

The guiding concern of the nineteenth-century historian has been to identify the variables responsible for change over time in a particular moral culture. The central issue for the twentieth-century anthropologist is to describe the symbolic organization of particular moral cultures and relate their differences to the modes of operation of their societies, viewed within both a moderately evolutionary and a cross-cultural perspective. There has been a shift from a case to a multiplicity of cases, from a processual to a structural analysis, from partial relationships to holistic models.

The anthropologist is concerned with formulating general models of the operation of moral systems which, though derived from a particular cultural case, might apply to other cases in which a similar fundamental premise is present. Where the anthropologist seeks (or has recently sought) such overall models, the historian has been content with suggesting part-relationships affecting the causes and effects of particular variables.

Is this only a difference between two disciplines? Or are we generally moving from a social science of dynamic empirical part-relationships to a social science of not only signifying but also energizing total designs? The answer for us is: both approaches are needed, and if we cannot achieve (and perhaps should not
seek) complete theoretical articulation between them, we need to be able to shift from one to the other as the need arises. But the logical order of the research process is the reverse of the historical sequence reviewed here. Structures need to be fully described before we can know what is and what is not changing. Only then can processes of change be adequately analyzed.

What has been gained in studies of moral culture by the twentieth-century anthropologist over the nineteenth-century historian? First, a greater awareness of the group structure of a civilization and of the coexistence within it of various kinds of moral cultures linked with the differences among the social groups. Gained has been also a more universal comparative perspective and a more comprehensive framework for analysis of the symbolic organizations of moral cultures derived in part from those comparative studies (and nourished in part by the current vitality of symbolic anthropology).

A gain is also the insistence that, in moral studies, we must consider not only the codifiable rules, but also the different assumptions about the dynamic relationships between merit and transgression (or virtue and vice) in the moral economy of the individual. It is not only particular acts, but the manner in which the overall condition of the individual is morally decided that matters in moral cultures. In the West, though not in India, it is possible to possess many virtues and still be in what Christians have called “the state of sin,” or even to have committed serious transgressions and yet be in a “state of grace.”

The basic issue is whether a person’s moral condition as a whole is crucially determined by an “essential” act or decision (whether his own or a god’s), as in Christianity and Islam, or whether it can be cumulatively improved or reduced by many lesser acts adding to or drawing upon his “store of merits,” as in Hindu and Buddhist traditions (and, to a lesser extent, in medieval Catholicism). On this issue, fundamentalist Protestants side with the Ayatollahs, liberal Protestants with the Hindus. The first position requires a rigorous “test of grace” (such as unconditional opposition to abortion which, to fundamentalists in American elections of the 1980’s, offset all other considerations in deciding the acceptability of the candidate). The latter attitude makes “sin” psychologically more acceptable, since it is assumed that it can always be neutralized by meritorious deeds or ritual performances.
A concern with the allocation of fault is also characteristic of the anthropological approach. In religious or quasi-religious traditions, the moral pollution arising from an act or event can be viewed as exclusively individual, as contagious (transmissible to either one's spouse and relatives, perhaps including those already dead or yet to be born, or to one's physical contacts or, in the case of the king, to his subjects), or as intrinsically collective (when the community as a whole is viewed as a moral agent).

What, in a religious framework, is the issue of pollution or guilt arising from a prohibited act (whether performance or "willing assent" in thought), becomes, in secular thinking the question of responsibility for an injurious act already committed or likely to be committed in the future (only performances count in this perspective, but one becomes responsible for trying to envision the effects of one's actions, even of one's language, on future developments).

Just as there are variable views of the social location of pollution in religious thought, so there are differing notions of responsibility in secular thought, from the isolating conception (characteristic of "classical" liberals) that the individual is responsible, but totally responsible, only for his own acts that he has freely chosen to commit, to various more socialized conceptions of responsibility based on some combination of the ideas (1) that moral decision is, to a greater or lesser degree, a collective and historical production, not an isolated individual act, and (2) that morally relevant action is hardly ever either wholly free or entirely coerced, and that therefore the acting individual is always responsible for what can be regarded as his or her transgressions, but that others (not necessarily all others, but including some others long dead) are also responsible for making these transgressions more probable.

Thus seventeen hundred years (from Origen to 1965) of Christian thinking of Jews as "radically different" from all other people (being regarded as the only people on earth collectively guilty of deicide) has been responsible for creating a collective structure of consciousness within which the program of extermination of Jews has become conceivable, whether or not the executors of this program were themselves Christians. Faced with such instances, the classical liberal view that the individual is responsible only for his own acts, and only if he has freely chosen to commit them, retains its claims upon individual consciousness but appears to be
excessive in atomizing the historical process of responsibility formation.

As compared to the nineteenth-century historian, the twentieth-century anthropologist has also lost a great deal. He is much less concerned with the causes of moral decay or fanaticism; the implications of various balances between rationality and emotionality ("moral feeling") in organizing moral conduct; the question of the adequacy of the moralizing institutions and of the relative effectiveness of their particular policies; attempts to gauge the impact of the moral imagination (as distinguished from the law or doctrine with which it may or may not be aligned); the sources and conditions of activation or dissipation of moral energies.

Some of these questions have been raised by other twentieth-century social scientists, especially in studies of genocide, obedience, and non-resistance to injustice, but most have been, in empirical research, largely forgotten. The current "restructuring" in the Soviet Union (in which efforts are being made to move from a rules- to a freedom-oriented moral system) offers a particularly promising field for a thorough investigation of these questions, in which both Soviet and Western scholars—whether jointly or separately—ought to be vitally interested.

Underlying Lecky's historical reconstruction has been a universal causal theory which sought to explain everything it was concerned with; but he did not provide adequate empirical proof of the probability of his explanations (and they remain mostly untested, though capable of empirical testing). Furer-Haimendorf has produced a series of particular descriptions of behavior arranged in accordance with a classificatory (evolutionary and cross-cultural) principle, but leaves much in the description causally unexplained.

And yet it is on these contributions that the comparative historical sociology must build in formulating its own approach to the study of moral designs. What it needs in the first place is a deeper conceptualization of the structure of moral designs, of their civilizational embeddedness, of their moralization mechanisms, and of the processes of their change.

Dickinson College
NOTES


3. What was true of Christianity in relation to Roman Stoicism is not a universal model for encounters between religion and secular philosophy. Several of the world religions divide into a "rational," law-oriented and an "emotional," love- or ecstasy-oriented wing. Romanticism is in part a moral philosophy. "Secular religions," particularly Fascism, contain a strong emotional thrust—which Marxism loses to the extent it ceases to operate as a secular religion.

4. The empirical basis of Lecky's generalizations is frequently impressionistic. Thus on this point he states: "The measures Marcus Aurelius had taken against Christianity were arrested under Commodus, whose favourite mistress, Marcia, supplies one of the very few recorded instances of female influence, which has been the cause of so much persecution, being exerted in behalf of toleration; ... The most atrocious of the Pagan persecutions was attributed ... to the mother of Galerius, and in Christian times the Spanish Inquisition was founded by Isabella, the Catholic; the massacre of St. Bartholomew was chiefly due to Catherine of Medicis, and the most horrible English persecution to Mary Tudor." (I, 443). The rule of a female influence on persecution, if such it is, does not hold for later political persecution.

To the extent Lecky has pointed out a real relationship, it can best be accounted for by John Stuart Mill's observation on the psychological effects of the deprivation of civil equality on women: "An active and energetic mind, if denied liberty, will seek power: refused the command of itself, it will assert the personality by attempting to control others." "The Subjection of Women," in Alice S. Rossi, ed., *Essays on Sex Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 238.

5. In imperial Rome, "On the one hand, we find a system of ethics [Stoic], of which ... it is not too much to say that though it may have been equalled, it has never been surpassed. On the other hand, we find a society almost absolutely destitute of moralising institutions, occupations, or beliefs, existing under an economical and political system which inevitably led to general depravity, and passionately addicted to the most brutalising amusements" (I, 291).

6. "... the moral contrasts shown in ancient life surpass those of modern societies, in which we rarely find clusters of heroic or illustrious men arising in nations that are in general very ignorant or very corrupt. I have endeavored to account for this fact by showing that the moral agencies of antiquity were in general much more fitted to develop virtue than to repress vice, and that they raised noble natures to almost the
highest conceivable point of excellence, while they entirely failed to attenuate the corruption of the depraved" (II, 308). Christianity was presumably more effective than imperial Roman paganism in repressing vice.

7. "... while public spirit had thus decayed in the capital of the [Roman] empire, there existed no independent or rival power to reanimate by its example the smoldering flame" (I, 264-265).

8. Christoph von Führer-Haimendorf, "The Sense of Sin in Cross-Cultural Perspective," Man, New Series, 9 (December, 1974), pp. 539-556 denies the universality of such a sequence. "While it appears that the sense of guilt and sin is most strongly developed in Christian, Islamic and Buddhist societies it would be misleading to correlate it too closely with sophisticated highly literate civilizations; for sin was clearly a dominant concept in the early books of the Old Testament and hence germane to a relatively primitive society of pastoral nomads and subsistence farmers, and we have seen that the food-gathering Semang expiate sins by offering their own blood ... no universally valid correlates between such concepts and economic levels of socio-political systems could be established" (pp. 554-555). A comparative history of what sin has meant in various periods and cultures remains to be written.

9. While this may help explain the historical emergence of organized persecution of ideological "heresies" or "infidelities," once organized ideological persecution becomes a visible option, it can be adopted even in societies without a strong native tradition of personal guilt-seeking, as in the People’s Republic of China or Cambodia.

10. Cf. Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970). What happens when horrific imagery escapes from the employ of any organized moral culture, as in nineteenth-twentieth century literature, historical accounts, and popular arts? Does it promote, or blunt, generalized moral sensitivity? My hypothesis would be that exposure to atrocities in mass media has a more reliable sensitizing effect on overall public opinion than on individual psyches; and then only if it occurs in an other than warlike atmosphere of mutual recrimination. Furthermore, such effects are likely to persist only if they are provided with institutional or movement supports.

11. "Liberty, which is often very unfavourable to theological systems, is almost always in the end favourable to morals: for the most effectual method that has been devised for diverting men from vice is to give free scope to a higher ambition" (Lecky, I, 261). The vices, for Lecky, are inhumanity and self-indulgence. The higher ambition is political. It is perhaps only in a democracy with a strong traditionalist morality that political ambition could appear as a moralizing force—thus in late 19th-century England, but hardly in late 20th-century America. Note that liberty does not repress vice, as Christian religion has sought to do, but diverts men from it. To Lecky, this seems sufficient.


https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol21/iss21/6


Thus, “Muslim ethics oscillates between motivation by a concern with human freedom, human guilt, human self-education, and a concern, almost a delight, in God's inscrutable and unrestrained lordship, which has often enough allowed the faithful to draw strength and self-respect from a sense of utter and almost reckless surrender and submission.” G. G. D. Grunebaum, “Concept and Function of Reason in Islamic Ethics,” *Orients*, 15 (1962), p. 11 (italics mine).


The tradition of research initiated by Anthony F. C. Wallace, “Revitalization Movements,” *American Anthropologist*, 58 (April 1956), pp. 264-281, has provided important contributions to addressing this issue. But it seems incapable of answering the question why some such movements, arising in periods of comparable “cultural distortion,” arrive at viable solutions, others commit themselves to destructive courses of action, and still others fail to acquire popular support. A crucial issue may be whether the saving message of the movement encompasses more than the preceding culture did (and thus becomes liberating even in its disciplines), or less (and thus becomes constricting even in its liberations).