

Societal Evolution:  
A Study of the Evolutionary Basis of the Science of Society

Albert Galloway Keller  
Professor of Science of Society – Yale University

New York: The Macmillan Company

1915

**PREFACE – PAGE Roman numerals**

People inject “Darwin” into everything. But he went back to Darwin himself to avoid being trendy and shallow.

Vi – He hopes what he presents here is not a metaphor. Darwin’s ideas of variation, selection, transmission, and adaptation are active in the life of societies as they are in organisms.

Vii – here he is building on Sumner.

**INTRODUCTION – PAGE 1**

5 – “I have said that social sciences know too little of natural science and its methods.”

6 – Darwin cannot be too well known to anyone who aspires to the name of scientist. Even his life story should be known.

7 – He notes Huxley and Darwin were not big fans of Spencer. Huxley poked fun at Spencers “diabolical dialectics.”

8 – Spencer associated society with progress; this is not a Darwinian view. Darwin speaks of improvement and retrogression, but both as adaptations to the environment.

10 – Kidd and Bagehot have helped advance the Darwinian study of society, but Darwin himself really got it going. But, alas, even Darwin strayed from facts and evidence in the Descent of Man.

14 – But variation, social selection, transmission and adaptation seem to be observable borrowings that don’t require leaps past evidence. They can help us see what social evolution really is.

## **CHAPTER ONE – EVOLUTION OF THE HUMAN TYPE - PAGE 17**

18 – The human animal varies culturally in response to the physical conditions surrounding them.

19 – Every tool is an extension of the body, modification with descent of the body. These are ideas materialized. These are culture.

20 – Mental and physical adaptation link. We will focus on the cultural / mental, but physical evolves too.

Civilization is a matter of numbers, so human adaptation is social as well as mental.

24 – Human population tends to increase up to the limit of the supporting power of the environment, on a given stage of the arts, and for a given standard of living – that is a given stage of civilization.

25 – Human mating has never been uncontrolled. We are not just free spirits.

26 – A favorite function of art is overstepping social conventions bounds. The prince marries a beggar – girl and all is happy. But, the offense of his parents by her manners is missed. This tells us nothing about the way things are in real life.

27 – Not law, most restriction and control come from convention.

28 – Instinct is first nature; convention second nature – the rules of the game for living in society.

30 – Public opinion enforces conventions – So to William Graham Sumner’s “folkways” and “mores.” Conventions and public opinion.

34 – “Association is in many cases an important advantage in the pursuit of the struggle for existence, and so becomes a basis of selection.”

36 – 37 – “The life of human beings, in all ages and stages of culture, is primarily controlled by a vast mass of folkways handed down from the earliest existence of the race, having nature of the ways of other animals, only the topmost layers of which are subject to control, and have been somewhat modified by human philosophy.”

41 – So there is no reason to refuse to extend the Darwinian theory, to the “Superorganic domain.” But in treating the evolution in the mores, one must always be ready to refer back to the underlying organic process, or he gets his feet off the earth and risks losing himself in vague speculation.”

## **CHAPTER TWO - VARIATION - PAGE 43**

43 – Variation is the opposite of uniformity and monotony and is the basis for all need of classification. If there were no variation among species, we couldn't classify them. Same for folkways.

From folkways they influence man and society. They produce inferences called mores. But we cannot always keep a clean cut distinction between them.

46 – Mutations in the mores are when two groups amalgamate, creating new combinations in the code.

48 – Politicians may make programs and new mechanical devices invented, But the fads and fancies are froth on the variation of folkways.

51 – Individuals pick up ideas that become the folkways of the group. “When they become the object of group approval and so become the embodiment of its prosperity policy, they become its mores. Here is where they enter into the field of societal evolution and invite the interest of the sociologist; for they are now social phenomena as distinguished from individual phenomena.”

“They probably go back to physical change in the individual brain and so root in organic processes and organic evolution, and in the resultant ‘race-character’ or temperament.”

## **CHAPTER THREE - SELECTION (Automatic) - PAGE 53**

54 – Customs and institutions arise, attain strength and vogue and disappear. We do not look to the individual or limited individuals to explain this.

55 – The individual may sign the emancipation proclamation, but he does it only as a representative.

56 – To bring about social selection, conflict between variations is needed. Struggle between different mores – prosperity policies.

58 – Ethnocentrism causes so many groups to denote themselves as “men” as distinguished from all others.

Keller says ethnocentrism is a specifically human sentiment – He is wrong.

Each group thinks its folkways the only right ones and others' excite scorn. They call them 'cow-eaters' and so forth. But we don't get upset about what we eat, it is what others eat.

59 – Thus ‘ethnocentrism’ leads a people to exaggerate and intensify everything in their own folkways which is peculiar and which differentiates them from others. It therefore strengthens the mores.” (Sumner quote).

60 – Religion is not rational, but an encoder and supporter of societies mores. Comes from ghosts of ancestors – supposedly – enforcing fidelity to code.

62 – Religion and ethnocentrism are irrational and so show their primitive origin.

63 – There are such things as harmful mores – codes which have developed or persisted in the absence of a decisive competition and test.

64 – But where tests are persistent, we see many abandoned mores: polyandry, the mother-family, cannibalism, incest.

65 – Non-conforming individuals are removed via isolation behind bars or more drastic measures.

66 – Civil wars and other deadly conflicts select swiftly and completely.

67 – “It is clear that the apparatus of civilization is calculated to shield men from the actions of natural selection; to interpose a bulwark between them and the physical environment; to ease up the conditions of the struggle for existence.”

69 – Thus we hear sentimentality in advanced civilization that is pure weak-mindedness. Abolition of the death penalty and the public lashing of wife-beaters, for example.

70 – Sentimentalists are warm of heart, but soft of head.

71 – We still remain animals. The ground shakes a little and thousands die. Men rage like savages again. Under the artificial life of man, we are animal – killed by random fluctuations.

In civilization, “the primitive selection of the mores through the annihilation of their bearers is largely replaced.”

72 – They are more often practiced between groups than within.

73 – Beyond annihilation via war, there is subjugation.

74 – This evolution does not necessarily point up. Consider the scorn of the nomadic conquerors for subjugated industrial peoples. And, the conquered industrial folks will not feel themselves backwards.

76 – Spencer said a lot about the benefit of homogeneity: the bond of blood (real or fictitious) and religion.

78 – You can have peace, but in a diverse society you have the struggle between sub-groups which accept the broad code of their social union. These in turn, subdivide into family mores.

83 – But in civilization, these sub-groups struggle not for existence, but for quality of existence. This can also be divergence of class groups.

84 – Rights are social. There was no need for Crusoe to talk of rights until Friday came along. That means there are no ‘natural’ rights, only social ones. Ultimately they rely on power, political power.

87 – Legislation alone cannot confer rights.

89 – Our passing on of offspring, power, rights is no longer decided by struggles to the death – it happens on a different plane and a different mode.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR – RATIONAL SELECTION – PAGE 90**

91 – Selection was life and death. Now it is societal, based on antecedent evolution. Mostly society moves on in an inert way, judging everything on the basis of code, rejecting this and accepting that, irrationally, made by comparison with tradition.

94 – Circumcision was started for religious, irrational reasons; and now is continued for hygiene.

96 – The evidence is often that we don’t do things for rational reasons. Primitive man just followed the ancestors.

97 – Science is trained and organized common sense.

98 – As Sumner noted, if we had to make rational judgments about all acts, it would be unendurable.

99- And a lack of competition can cause societies to atrophy a bit. Look at China, once the world leaders, now languishing. Japan was woken between 1810 and 1910.

100- Usually, just following what society says is enough to get us by.

101 - Newton could concentrate a little longer than the rest of his fellows.

102- But we are all only human beings with minds that tire and attention that flags.

105 – Elections are largely irrational. People have differing prosperity policies, but most of their attacks are ad hominem.

109- Demagogues are a consistent possibility.

114 – “The masses are far from being saturated with knowledge, even in the most advanced countries. “ And, they are the seat of mores.

Leading classes can lead by example, setting a standard of elegance, refinement, and nobility. But, when they influence thus, it is unspoken, unconscious and unintentional.

115 – These days we try to effect cultural change by legislation and preaching. They both fail because they do not affect ritual, and because they always aim at great results in a short time.

116 – Still, being educated, the leading classes have a better shot at leading the masses in a rational direction.

119 – Many laws are obeyed because they are laws. They are hated until they are accepted; then they are natural and right.

122 – Plans aside, we are mostly guided by irrational mores. For societal change, the masses must change and this is often restrained by physical and societal environments.

123 – Let us now consider society as an indivisible organism – look at the whole, rather than the parts.

125 – Legislators look out for their few constituents, not society as a whole. He seems to think the wisdom of the masses is a good brake on the whims of reformers.

126 – Local demands don’t change general social mores. Is there a way to do so? Selection.

#### **CHAPTER FIVE – RATIONAL SELECTION (Continued) – PAGE 128**

128 – Verification is the hallmark of reason. This happens via experimentation in natural sciences. Social sciences cannot do this and so are jealous.

131 – People in the US know they should learn English, tests lie all about them and are immediate and decisive.

132 – Some mores get tested by the struggle for existence; some are more buffered.

133 – Sumner divided activities of society into self-maintenance, self-perpetuation, and self-gratification, adding to these the mental and social reactions out of which come religious and regulative systems. Self-maintenance is closest to the need to survive: Marriage and family, for example.

134 – We cannot judge all, but we can usually judge relative economic mores. In this arena superior knowledge is conceded.

136 – You can convince a savage that his stone hatchet sucks long before you convince him that his family system is – the fact is closer to self-maintenance.

141 – If self-maintenance changes, secondary forms usually change. If a pastoral tribe goes agricultural, their social forms change. People will behave “as you’d expect” in the new situation.

142 – When the struggle for existence is fierce, the finer sentiments decline; selfishness comes out again from the repression under which culture binds it.

144 – Men feel self-interest before feeling self-control and prudence. We need distress.

146 – The socialist keeps a person from engaging in the reform they need and so only prolongs distress.

In this sense the man with capital is not equal to the man without; a man with a tool can get more food than a man with no plow.

Social equity comes from an excess of land, not 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers.

149 – Not logic, but the “current of belief” carries the day. You couldn’t have taken down the aristocracy when land was scarce. In the USA, that was a potential.

150 – When some mores progress others retrogress. The factory put many mores into regression.

151 – We see this with feminism. Agriculture is necessary for slavery to exist. Ideas of chastity, decency, etc, the position of women, her economic function, sex-division in labor all vary from agriculture to industry.

Religions, such as the snake dance and bear dance, also bear their mark of economic substructure.

Gun powder, the compass, wireless communication, all had impacts on culture.

155 – Marriage and property are conjoined throughout history. Dowry goes with the wife, not a mere consort.

In 1862 the Dutch tried to put away the bride price in South Sumatra, to no avail.

157 – Land is chosen based on the ability to defend it, not psychic characteristics of the nation.

160 – Consistency of morals means consistency with all the societal self-maintenance. When the soil changes, so must the crop.

167 – So to “improve” society, you must improve its self-maintenance by rational selection.

### **CHAPTER SIX – COUNTERSELECTION – PAGE 169**

169 – Societal selection is distinct from natural selection. It operates as between groups rather than as between individuals, and so favors social superiorities rather than biologic ones. The Romans beat the Germans due to organization, not physical prowess.

170 – Any selection that results in the survival of the biologically less fit is counter-selection.

171 – Darwin discusses the idea without the term counterselection. Schallmayer talks of the survival of the unfit.

Because war and military organization selects on a more primitive basis, it is prevailingly counterselective.

173 – Industrial prosperity replaces “natural mating” with a less impulsive type. This can delay or even get rid of breeding among the prosperous.

Darwin looked at primogenitur Schallmayer looked more at celibacy and moderns not having kids.

174 – The Spanish Inquisition was counter selective as it killed those daring to be different.

175 – In industrial society we have probably emancipated ourselves from the sway of natural forces too fully.

175 – Schallmayer also looks at the “individualistic tendency of humanitarianism.” Keller takes this to indicate that we look at the individual case with no regard to the society’s interest.



176 – “Humanitarianism in general is, of course, counterselective, for it always eases the struggle for existence.” It works against the elimination of those who are losing in the conflict for existence.

Though no one denies the social value of aiding our fellow man with discrimination.

177 – “In truth, since the whole trend of civilization is to interpose barriers to the action of natural selection, societal selection is logically certain to preserve those who would perish under nature.”

Group and individual selection are different. But, we man is, in the last analysis, an animal. Our new mode of selection is performed “as it were, only upon a scaffolding created by his civilization – only in an artificialized environment.”

178 – We cannot put more and more weight upon the scaffolding without strengthening the supports. We should have an eye on this process, though we cannot hope to go back to situations where nature decided.

181 – Glasses make an unfit man fit. Wearing clothes and living in houses is too, by that logic.

183 – When all are given the right to survive, there is no distinction made between the biologically fit and the unfit.

184 – In general birth-rate declines with advance standards of living to race – suicide. Galton shows what a slight change in fertility would mean in 300 years.

186 – And while this may be happening, and slow the growth of the best equipped, the author thinks this natural and that the best equipped will be replaced by others, perhaps slower, but progress will go on. A) We need the prolonged training that delays birth for society to advance; b) there is no way to make people at lower ends to stop having babies.

We see this with priest celibacy being part of a social order that perpetuates itself.

189 – Societal evolution is the evolution of society and its institutions, not a series of individuals.

Medicine and hygiene mean more survive, and some of these counter selected have contributed greatly. But we must always ask, “What will the scaffolding stand?” So excessive shortsighted humanitarianism must be avoided.

195 – Here Keller looks at Galton, who calls eugenics a new religion. But, Keller doubts this is a religion. And, finds dim the possibility of changing such deep mores via rationality.

199 – Galton cites primitive sex restrictions. But none of these, Keller notes, were put in by rational choice.

204 – We can prohibit mating by grosser types of imbeciles, but, “Recent laws about sterilization horrify many sensible people; and to justify such a horror there is always a reservoir of argumentation, illustration, and interpretation to be drawn upon.” Reproduction licenses run against our code.

205 – We cannot get a man excited about what will happen in the 15<sup>th</sup> generation; but we can excite them about what they are currently paying for, supporting others, out of their own self-maintenance funds.

### **CHAPTER SEVEN – TRANSMISSION – PAGE 208**

209 – Keller doesn’t accept that the transmission of mores from generation to generation is like the transmission of genes in natural selection.

210 – He does not mean that there is no biological heredity involved. For example, women’s chastity mores are part natural part mores. This does not mean that the process of more transmission is the same as heredity.

211 – The language, manners, mores of time and place must be learned. The factor corresponding to heredity is tradition. The organ of transmission are eye, ear, tongue, senses; not sex.

Variation in heredity and variation in tradition serve the same function. Yet forms are conserved in traditon.

213 – This combination of variation and tradition allows accumulation of societal variations.

214 – Folkways include judgment, thus making them mores – prosperity policy. This is held in place, partially, by ghost-fear (religion). This gives us conservatism.

215 – Transmission of the mores takes place through the agency of imitation or of inculcation.

216 – Acculturation happens when two groups meet and learn from each other. Parallelism is when two societies, with no contact, evolve closely similar societal forms. Here we only look at the former.

217 – Positive conscious transmission, inculcation or education, passes on successful mores. Imitation passes on all the mores, even those that should be eliminated.

218 – Education, rational transmission, happens from the older to the younger. Imitation is more likely between the young.

219 – There is also transmission from children to parent and between groups. Acculturation, though, between groups is reduced by ethnocentrism – a conservative tendency. The elder to youth transmission most preserves tradition.

220 – Ontogeny repeats phylogeny. Before launching, he makes disclaimers to the effect that this is looked at for suggestion, not as true.

223 – The infant starts with no mores; children are like savages; Lying and thieving is what they do. Force is the means to title with them.

225 – Peal says that there is free sex in some tribes until marriage, then polygamy sets in.

227 – At home we have personal sanctions, but at school wider more impersonal sanctions prevail. This is development.

228 – Education now is hard because the consequences of learning are so far removed from those that held with Dad on the hunt.

230 – Distance and knowing that educators themselves disagree about what should be taught undermines student acceptance. The three Rs are not disputed, but higher ed's value is.

231 – But we can learn! “The program of education represents the greatest systematic attempt to put rational selection into operation the world has ever seen.

232 – When we realize the young have no fixed code, and are impressionable, it increases our sense responsibility.

233 – 237 The dynamics of imitation, in which he incorrectly pegs apes as good imitators.

238 – primitive people's mores maintenance has happened imitatively, irrationally, and almost unconsciously. They do not test their morals against others. “The mores run out into ritual, and the ritual, being supported by ethnocentric and religious sanction becomes stereotyped and unchanging.”

239 – “The very word “tradition” is synonymous with negation of change or ‘progress. In the absence of variation, competition, and selection, it tends, like heredity in organic evolution, to singleness of type and to monotony.”

240 – Imitation of the “lower” races of the “higher” (his air quotes) is largely material. Clothing and externals.

242 – The Romans never tried to ‘assimilate’ their provinces. But their ways made them accept the economic substructure, which led to the provinces adopting advanced civilizations ways. Trade is the great carrier of civilization.

245 – Livingstone said the best way to eradicate slavery in Africa was to improve the transportation system. Culture follows infrastructure. But the cultural adaption must fit the economic situation. The US government’s organization would not fit in Fiji. It would be superfluously complex.

#### **CHATPER EIGHT – ADAPTATION – PAGE 247**

247 – Sumner wrote that as “we go upwards from the arts to the mores and from the mores to the philosophies and ethics, . . . we leave bend the arena on which natural selection produces progressive evolution.” There, we have “no boundaries and no effective competition. The contests are freer and freer and the results of the conflicts less and less decisive.”

249 – Darwinian is neither progressive nor regressive. It is both. And, in the end, it is adaptive to environments.

251 – Naïve ethnocentrism kept people self-satisfied and prevented them from learning from others.

252 – But, he continues, this is defensible. It is not healthy to make tribal people ditch habitudes that are conducive to survival in their environment. The Hawaiiin king taking 25% of his subjects pay was not taken as oppressive by them and when Christians stopped it, their birthrate went down.

254 – Darwin wrote of slavery being bad, though it replaced killing of captives. Someone criticized his lack of historicity. Darwin replied, “I believe your criticism is quite just about my deficient historical spirit, for I am aware of my ignorance in this line.” I love Darwin! How humble.

255 – “Dispassionateness and an austere objectivity must characterize the attitude of anyone who wishes to deal scientifically with society’s evolution.” [Can we resist the TV and best China’s mores? It is a scientific question as well as a moral one].

258 – “Civilization results also in the freeing of energy from the mere struggle for existence.” “Artistic creations, for example, while they may on occasion unmistakably reflect environmental influences, may on other occasions betray no connection with them.”

260 – It is hardly questioned that in lower societies adaption is predominantly to the physical environment. Yet, there is the world of ghosts and spirits. These are though, remarkably, entirely anthropomorphic.

261 – He now launches on portraying the adaptation of three societies: primitive Eskimos, early American colonists and . . .

264 – In the Eskimos we see the disaster of introducing the rifle. It has led to indiscriminate killing and undermining of their food supply. [Cultures conservative ways are good at times].

265 – Only Eskimos have the dome as it was not necessary or practical for others – culture follows conditions of adaptation.

266 – Keller says that militancy and commercialism are under-represented in Eskimo culture due to a very low population density. But they do leave their old to die in the snow.

268 - This also means low levels of government.

270 – Endogamy is necessary under such conditions. The position of women in this hunting heavy environment is not high. But, she is necessary, so not a slave.

271 – “The severity of the struggle is such that but little energy can be freed for the arts of pleasure. They have slim religion too.

#### **CHAPTER NINE – ADAPTATION (Continued) – PAGE 306**

274 – Frontier society is odd because the populace come from advanced civilizations and endure the hardships of tribes.

276 – “Reversion is as much adaptation as is progression; both are evolution.”

277 – There are two types of frontier societies: Those in temperate zones (Farms) and those in the Tropics (Plantation).

278 – The relation of population to means of subsistence gives us the Law of Population: That is, the population tends to increase up to the supporting power of the environment on a given stage of the arts.

If there is a lot of land, the arts may decline and the population may increase. Thus new lands will be settled. But, the arts will not decline to the level occupied by the local natives.

279 – But this leads to less protection from natural selection. This is no place for the weak. In fact, there is a preliminary selection as only the strong will go on the frontier and there are fewer women than otherwise. Counterselection is much less frequent under such situations. Temperate climates produce strong populations and an increase in numbers.

280 – Empty land provides a vacuum.

281 – The Hundred Years War and black plague made lots of frontiers, selected for survivors, reduced traditional tenure and led to a rise in contract relations.

283 – But in the US colonies, we see a drop from manufacturing or commercial culture to agriculture and even hunting.

284 – Nearly all do cattle, whatever other occupation they may have. And, there is a lack of specializations and increase in jack-of-all-trades.

285 – Consumption was local and simple, wearing skins even. Trade in beaver skins. Rent is low.

286 – The standard of living being unrefined, cultured travelers scoffed at it.

287 – Methods of warfare were those of the Indian.

288 – The type of entertainment is a “show” and homely festivities. Turkey shooting. Politics made a nice diversion. But, it was simple.

289 – Children were an asset and women helpers, were not hired, they just helped.

290 – Religion was not refined.

291 – And, as Sumner says, there was little in the way of class deference due to self-sustaining and none being too rich.

292 – Thus, equality did not come by metaphysical European theorems.

295 – Regulation was less extensive and more intensive, including less, but operating with greater severity. Lynch law and court martial style justice. It is not the primitive form, but closer to it.

297 – 8 – Here he looks at criminals going to Australia becoming good members of society. One reason is that things that are crimes in the Old World are not misdemeanors in the frontier. Boisterousness and aggression are crimes in civilization and assets on the frontier.

299 – What does this say about ‘progress’? Sometimes retrogression is more adaptive.

300 – In temperate zones, since life is relatively good, more immigrants come and more women too and so there is less intermixing with the locals and less “half-breeds” [his term].

301 – In warmer climes, however, we need to produce luxury goods in vast quantities to survive. The white man cannot do the work in this weather on this scale so people get enslaved and not many whites come. Mostly men do. Ruling is not democratic. The population becomes “mongrel.” [again, his word]. Absentee landlords and aristocracy follow.

## **CHAPTER TEN – ADAPTATION (Continued) – PAGE 331**

306 – The complication studying an advanced society is that the artificial environment presents a sort of scaffolding, a plane above the artificial surface.

307 – As a necessity civilizations, having labor, capital and free interchange must have industry, foresight, and mutual toleration; and the opposite qualities of slothfulness, improvidence, and animosity must be represented in the minimum.

308 – At this stage, the competition is industrial, not military. This is a Spencerian paradigm.

309 – The peaceful characteristics of civilization would have been very maladaptive at an earlier stage.

312 – Rural versus urban. Mass housing, food, everything. But, individual thought is a driver in industrial inventions. Nature is rarely encountered by the city person. We have seen many comedies where the rustic person comes to the city.

The mores of the city are more cumulative, they change and grow – unlike the rural. And they are heterogeneous and unstable.

314 – Self gratification is a more of the city.

315 – Public amusement is highly organized and has, for many, taken the place of the home as the center of diversion and social intercourse. Concomittantly, we have the decline in marriage and lower birthrate.

316 – So population growth is by accretion, not birth. The women are wage earners. There is a problem on how to raise the children. And so adaption is easier if you do not have children.

318 – There is less religion in cities because the setting is divergent from the place religion started. It cannot lose 1/7<sup>th</sup> of its work time to church. You also meet people of so many different backgrounds.

319 - The Bible reflects rural conditions.

321 – Cities require constant regulations and inspection.

323 – Immigrants are surprised to find that they cannot sell their wares on the street, make noises as they wish or spit on the sidewalk. It doesn't seem free. The boss or padrone is a necessary buffer for this experience.

324 - European peasants can celebrate their harvest festival, but they cannot keep pigs in the tenement. So the culture gets uprooted from the production.

325 – This mess is to be run as a democracy, but no one can understand the ballots; so politicians run it.

The artificiality of the environment is carried out via sewage-systems, water-supply and rapid transit, and further adaptations of school systems.

326 – So an enormous and complicated system of social control evolves to meet life-conditions.

326 – So if we look at the Eskimos, colonists, and NYC we see that every established and settled human institution is justifiable in its setting as an adaptation.