

Morgan and Tylor Mirrors

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Introduction

There are some obvious similarities between both the ethnographic works of Morgan and the theoretical works of Tylor, and the concepts presented by Marx and Spencer. This paper will attempt to bring forth the similarities between these two pairs of scholars by examining the premises used to support their arguments and the overall conclusions of their arguments.

I

In the article by Edward Tylor, “The Science of Culture”, even just by the use of the title, implied that civilization as it stands now in cultures across the globe is something that could be measured objectively in the name of science. The principles of civilization were based on the necessity of causality; each uniform action had a uniform cause.[4, p. 27] Here Tylor was specifically drawing a connection between the predictability of nature and predictability of people, hence turning sociology, anthropology into a “real” science. Although there was uniform action with uniform cause, he stated that the varying types of cultures in existence throughout the world could be explained then by historical evolution.

Completing Tylor’s connection between the natural world and the social world he underscored some of natural science’s irrefutable tenets: the unity of nature,

the fixity of laws, the contiguity of cause and effect, and general order of the cosmos (that nothing happens without sufficient reason.)[4] In the study of humans, however, metaphysics and religion have put too much behind arguments against regular laws. The basic concept behind the denial of basic laws for humans, argues Tylor, is persistence and necessity to believe in free will: freedom to act, and to do so at random. Humans acting at random is about as preposterous as a fog settling at random without due cause (I.E.: without the action of warm and cold air mixing.)

In Tylor's study of civilization, he dissected the culture into its constituent details or parts: weapons, textiles, myths and religion, etc. In such a manner, the ethnographers can then act as a naturalist would. He makes an analogous argument to animals in that the availability and use of tools from one culture to the next constitutes different "species" of study. So that, for example, the flattening of skulls to the counting by tens would constitute different species to him. He extends the naturalist-animal analogy to encompass the geographical distribution of human artifacts and their transmission from region to region as a naturalist would study an animal's migration pattern.[4, p. 31] Every event has a cause, and the varying types of cultures were produced by the same causes; yet to see how *similar* things are is proof of the evolution of culture. Tylor explains the similarities through the diffusion of culture. Diffusion of culture throughout countries denotes a consensus on some established modes of behavior: language, religion, art, law, etc.

Further Tylor argued that culture obviously evolves because inventions and discoveries lead to other inventions and accumulations of knowledge. Those that remain the same, he calls survival artifacts. The survival artifacts are old customs that are unchanged because they are proven solutions to problems. Other cultural artifacts are the result of one of progress, degradation, survival, revival and modification; the active influences of life on society constitute these general characteristics which physically embody themselves as fashion, language etc.

This evolution of culture based on accumulated knowledge is Morgan's basic premise in his article "Ethnical Periods." However, unlike Tylor, Morgan actually collected his data out in the field, arriving at his categorization of culture base on artifacts-the material production of the necessities of survival. He outlined the progress of civilizations into seven basic categories for comparison: subsistence, food production; government, clans to political structures; language, sign language to speech to the written word; the family, genealogy; religion, un-understandable because it deals with emotions and imagination; architecture, from hut to skyscraper; and property, from public to private.

Morgan also explained the origins of government, in so doing noting the differ-

ence between nation (kinship government) and state (property based government); while the former consists of a patrilineal unit of organization, the latter is based on the town as the unit of organization. In this case, the town is representative of the concept of real private property, we will return to the implications of this when we discuss its link to Marx. The evidence to back his theory of the development of government mainly comes from the remaining institutions of the native races, the repetitive patterns of organization from sex, through kinship, to territorial, and that the experiences of mankind have all run a similar course due to similar obstacles, and hence substantially similar results because of the same physiological equipment.

Morgan used evidence from the tribes he had studied to categorize and compare the various civilizations. In order to categorize he needed a separate and distinct set of periods that do not overlap. For this he created his three major stages of savagery, barbarism, and civilization, further subdivided into lower, middle and upper. The purpose of the classification was to demonstrate that many different tribes might be at different stages but at the *same time*; time may be immaterial, but *condition is a material fact*. Further, it gives direction to the study of specific cultures and tribes which demonstrate the particular period specifically. Morgan explains that the diffusion of the various races of humans caused the evolutionary process to be disrupted. The development or lack of pottery, for example, in the different races throughout the world, apart from being a strong indicator for village life, show that there was a material need for it even long before the technology was discovered. Hence pottery was a technological breakthrough.

II

First off, Tylor's entire theory is just that; it has no basis on really going out into the field and analyzing direct data. In fact, he addresses a concern of the reader that the data he collects from people out in the field might be disingenuous, or erroneous. On this note, Tylor, unlike Morgan, enters into a question begging premise with his explicit explanation of culture "clearly" evolving. While he states that the same causes could have produced different culture, the fact that the cultures are similar, is clear and distinct proof of the evolution. To this end, he states the fact that two distinct people let's call them Smith and Jones, in the East and the West come up with identical observations of two different cultures proves the veracity of the observations, to which one may conclude that these cultures have evolved from the same "causes". Something he does not directly address is the fact that if

the two observations are different, then what does that say about the two cultures? Tylor argues that it shows that the cultures are in different stages of development. To use a cliché, it is a win-win situation; to reference Popper, he does not put his theory forth for falsification, making the theory about as accurate as Freudianism: there's no evidence, so *ad hoc* patches may be made. The link between Tylor and Herbert Spencer then is apparent: they are working, not from the ground up, but from theory down. Both Spencer and Tylor are making the facts fit the theory, not the other way round, as a result their arguments are tautological.

Tylor's argument about the diffusion culture within a nation and its resulting similarity being based on common consensus is another link to Spencer. Through this common consensus of people, can we then classify culture in order to compare them.[4, p. 32] Spencer noted that the will of the people, or a society is based on the averages of the will of individual. [5, p. 13]

Lastly, the largest link between Spencer and Tylor is the use of nature to justify the evolution of human-kind. Throughout Tylor's article there are common analogical references between nature and humans. His entire section on causality demonstrates that link: just as in nature nothing happens without due cause, in human-kind, nothing happens without due cause. Hence, the natural evolution of human-kind from savages to civilization is demonstrated through differences - advanced technology.

The evolutionary theory of mankind was not endemic to Tylor and Spencer, both Marx and Morgan held this belief. However, Marx and Morgan grounded their theories on the material production of cultures. Morgan worked his way up from the actual practices of the varying cultures he observed. Unlike Tylor, this placed Morgan's theory on the table to be falsified (leading to the easy deconstruction of his theory later). However, it also made his theory stronger at that moment.

Time and again, Morgan referred to the creation and evolution of the savage and barbarian civilizations as a necessary product of the living conditions of the tribes. From the evolution of the body politic, property based governments through the necessity of the establishment of the family for kinship based governments.[3, p. 43] Morgan also makes reference and explains in detail the necessity of a seemingly insignificant artifact with which to draw the evolutionary lines, pottery, as resultant of a material need for storage of food, pointing to the existence of other low-tech storage mechanisms like basket-weaving, as a pre-cursor to hi-tech pottery making.[3, p. 49-50] In these respects, it seems that Morgan is using Marx's argument that evolution is not applicable in the *natural* physical sciences sense, but rather as a means to an end: survival.

Morgan's base premise as outlined in the beginning of his essay also points to the fact of material causation: "[the tribes'] struggle with opposing obstacles while winning their way to civilization." [3, p. 41] And mentions this point again, when referring to the powers of comparative study not in temporal relations, which he regarded as "immaterial", but conditional relations: "...different tribes and nations on the same continent, and even of the same linguistic family, are in different conditions at the same time, ... the *condition* of each is the material fact, the *time* being immaterial." [3, p. 48]

References

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- [4] Tylor, Edward. "The Science of Culture." McGee 26-41.
- [5] Spencer, Herbert. "The Social Organism." McGee 11-27.