

Seminal Social Catalysts

Divisions of Authority and Property

The first catalysts, likely some of the most intense, established formal and informal rules regarding property rights and sanctioned killing. From these seminal catalysts of an evolving ethical system, society likely grew with the speed of a newly inseminated egg. Because formal and informal rules and social contracts of behavior have evolved over so many thousands of years, it is difficult to comprehend the dynamics of ethical evolution in the classic sense of deontological and teleological ethics. The dynamics are difficult to understand, in part, simply because divisions of labor, property rights, authority, and duty create an intricate web of relationships, all of which a person must consciously acknowledge in order to navigate through society properly. With every passing year, these relationships become more numerous and refined. After thousands of years the web is so complex, in terms of the number of obligations that an ordinary person must satisfy, that it is nearly impossible for the average person to

understand why many obligations and ethical rules have come to be in the first place.

When divisions of labor are defined in finer and finer detail, and matters of property become more clearly demarcated, intricate systems of custom, protocol, and decorum emerge, which define a system of methods for transferring property, achieving rank, or satisfying obligations. The idea of property begins to extend itself to more and more abstract applications once the rudimentary idea of it is understood. The organization of the earliest ethical systems thus begins to accelerate, because “property” in the abstract means that when time and energy are given to another person, that time and energy must someday be repaid in some form. Obligations arise from the increasing complexity of society. People somehow learn to benefit from each other, and the ingenious bartering of their time and energies makes the creative process more efficient. When certain people default on their obligations because they believe it is profitable for them to do so those who meet their obligations eventually become aware of the cheating and force changes in the customs and laws. As centuries pass, various methods of cheating the social good for personal gain become known, and they are described, recorded, and stigmatized in emergent moral systems. Cooperative people develop strong attitudes called morals about those who are uncooperative and counterproductive to the efforts of the moral group (rule followers). Ethical rules evolve from persistent moral attitudes, which eventually influence the construction of

legal mandates that censure certain behaviors such as lying, stealing, fighting, and murder.

A harmonious and peaceful society does not emerge overnight, because people have emotions and intellectual deficiencies that interfere with their best intentions to build a peaceful world. The more people work on resolving these deficiencies, the more coordinated social actions become. History in a sense chronicles the process of learning and synchronizing.