

abstract, lofty code of moral principles, when in reality all we are doing is obeying a deeply ingrained and long 'forgotten' set of purely imitative impressions. It is the unmodifiable obedience to these impressions (along with our carefully concealed instinctive urges) that makes it so hard for societies to change their customs and their 'beliefs'. Even when faced with exciting, brilliantly rational new ideas, based on the application of pure, objective intelligence, the community will still cling to its old home-based habits and prejudices. This is the cross we have to bear if we are going to sail through our vital juvenile 'blottingpaper' phase of rapidly mopping up the accumulated experiences of previous generations. We are forced to take the biased opinions along with the valuable facts.

Luckily we have evolved a powerful antidote to this weakness which is inherent in the imitative learning process. We have a sharpened curiosity, an intensified urge to explore which work against the other tendency and produce a balance that has the potential of fantastic success. Only if a culture becomes too rigid as a result of its slavery to imitative repetition, or too daring and rashly exploratory, will it flounder. Those with a good balance between the two urges will thrive. We can see plenty of examples of the too rigid and too rash cultures around the world today. The small, backward societies, completely dominated by their heavy burden of taboos and ancient customs, are cases of the former. The same societies, when converted and 'aided' by advanced cultures, rapidly become examples of the latter. The sudden overdose of social novelty and exploratory excitement swamps the stabilising forces of ancestral imitation and tips the scales too far the other way. The result is cultural turmoil and disintegration. Lucky is the society that enjoys the gradual acquisition of a perfect balance between imitation and curiosity, between slavish, unthinking copying and progressive, rational experimentation.