What influences us from the moment of birth?

Custom has not commonly been regarded as a subject of any great moment.

The inner workings of our own brains we feel to be uniquely worthy of investigation, but custom, we have a way of thinking, is behaviour at its most commonplace.

As a matter of fact, it is the other way around.

Traditional custom, taken the world over, is a mass of detailed behaviour more astonishing than what any one person can ever evolve in individual actions, no matter how aberrant.

Yet that is a rather trivial aspect of the matter.

The fact of first-rate importance is the predominant role that custom plays in experience and in belief, and the very great varieties it may manifest.

No man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes.

He sees it as being edited by a definite set of customs and institutions, and ways of thinking.

Even in his philosophical probings he cannot go behind these stereotypes; his very concepts of the true and the false will still have reference to his particular traditional customs.

John Dewey has said in all seriousness that the part played by the custom in shaping the behavior of the individual, as against any way in which he can affect traditional custom, is as the proportion of the total vocabulary of his mother tongue against those words of his own baby talk that are taken up into the vernacular of his family.

When one seriously studies the social orders that have had the opportunity to develop autonomously, the figure becomes no more than an exact and matter-of-fact observation.

The life history of the individual is first and foremost an accommodation to the patterns and standards traditionally handed down in his community.

From the moment of his birth, the customs into which he is born shape his experience and behavior.

By the time he can talk, he is the little creature of his culture, and by the time he is grown and able to take part in its activities, his habits are his habits, his beliefs his beliefs, his impossibilities his impossibilities.

Every child that is born into his group will share them with him, and no child born into one on the opposite side of the globe can ever achieve the thousandth part.

There is no social problem it is more incumbent upon us to understand than this of the role of custom.

Until we are intelligent as to its laws and varieties, the main complicating facts of human life must remain unintelligible.

The study of custom can be profitable only after certain preliminary propositions have been accepted, and some of these propositions have been violently opposed.

In the first place, any scientific study requires that there be no preferential weighting of one or another of the items in the series it selects for its consideration.

In all the less controversial fields, like the study of cacti or termites or the nature of nebulae, the necessary method of study is to group the relevant material and to take note of all possible variant forms and conditions.

In this way, we have learned all that we know of the laws of astronomy, or of the habits of the social insects, let us say.

It is only in the study of man himself that the major social sciences have substituted the study of one local variation, that of Western civilization.

Anthropology was, by definition, impossible, as long as these distinctions were set up on an emotional basis.

There was one world of behavior that was right, and every other world of behavior was wrong.

This attitude automatically made a clean field for missionary endeavors.

It made any study of other cultures well-nigh impossible.

It made the white man's burden a heavy one indeed.

It checked the growth of tolerance and favored a disparaging attitude toward other races.

In recent years, however, the subject has begun to wear on people's minds.

It was no longer possible to rest in the comparative study of institutions and so be content to see the neighbour's institutions in terms of one's own.

It was no longer possible to see the neighbor's superstition.

It was necessary to recognize that these institutions, which are based on the same premises, let us say the supernatural, must be considered together, our own among the rest.

The statement ‘No man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes’ means that no one can view the world completely objectively.

The study of man has differed from the study of less controversial subjects in that it has only studied one variation, Western civilization, instead of all possible variations.

Before he can undertake the study of man objectively, the anthropologist must accept the criterion that there is no preferential weighting between one human society and another.

The president will speak to the nation on a matter of great significance.

They suggested that the man’s aberrant behavior was the result of taking drugs.

The President of the United Nations played a predominant role in restoring peace to that part of the world.

The disease typically manifests itself in a high fever and chest pains.

The investigations of the police into the man’s finances eventually uncovered connections with organized crime.

When he spoke to the locals, he lapsed into the vernacular.

If the group of islands had been allowed to develop autonomously (instead of being governed from the mainland), things might have been a lot better for them.

‘It is incumbent upon us all,’ said the chairman rather pompously, ‘to report all incidents of criminal activity, however minor, to the police.’

The vast majority of people are not intelligent as to the inner workings of the Civil Service.

The engineer’s explanation was completely unintelligible to most of us because it was highly technical.

The first part of the exam, the oral interview, has always been given preferential weighting over the other two parts.

Although the proposal was extremely controversial, they managed to get it passed by the committee.

In medieval times, the Church held sway over many countries in Europe.

From the moment we are born, our attitude to life is shaped by custom.

It manifests itself in many varieties and plays a predominant role in experience and belief.

It is impossible to view the world objectively because we are all influenced by a set of customs, institutions, and ways of thinking.

Even an individual’s concepts of true and false are conditioned by the customs of his community.

By the time he can talk, a child is already the creation of his culture, and by the time he is grown up, he has become part of that culture.

There can be no absolute standards of right and wrong since our moral attitudes are conditioned by the society in which we live.

While our moral attitudes may be conditioned by the society in which we live and by its customs and laws, this does not mean that there can be no absolute standards of right and wrong, standards which we can all aim at and which we somehow know to be right.

Perhaps we should first consider the proposition that our moral attitudes are conditioned by the society in which we live.

It would be difficult to disagree with the commonly held view that our moral attitudes are, to a large extent, shaped by our parents, other members of our family, and the circle of friends with whom the members of our family associate.

For most of us, our concepts of right and wrong are taught to us or instilled into us by our parents.

Pulling your sister’s hair for no reason is wrong; picking her up when she has fallen down is right.

Picking fruit from your father’s trees is fine since the trees belong to the family, but picking fruit from a neighbor’s trees without asking is wrong.

In Western cultures, at least, saying ‘Please’ and ‘Thank you’ is right, and demanding and receiving without saying anything is wrong.

Such simple and basic standards of right and wrong are reinforced by other parent figures in our own society by praise or punishment—by our teachers at school, by the religious leaders in our community, and reinforced, too, by our peers who are being taught the same right and wrong.

Even families in the same society have slightly different standards, but they all aim towards a common standard.

However, in this modern world of mass communication—radio, television, magazines and newspapers, e-mail and the Internet—there are many more influences on us and on our thinking than was ever the case in the past.

The world is smaller, it is true, even though it is still composed of people with widely different cultures.

International figures condemn criminal acts committed against the international community as a whole or acts which eventually involve the international community as a whole, such as the hijacking of aircraft or oil tankers, or terrorist threats to international events like the Olympic Games.

In condemning such acts, world leaders seem to be demonstrating that there are absolute standards of right and wrong, and in condemning, they rarely wave any particular religious or political banners.

In the same way, we deplore the circumstances in the modern world which allow thousands and thousands to die through lack of food and water or from diseases that we ought to be able to cure.

Such situations are surely ‘wrong’ and the majority of us are horrified.

Organised international aid again would seem to argue that there are standards which all communities and nationalities acknowledge, which are not related to any one particular political or religious creed, but which are, quite simply, ‘humanitarian’.

There are absolute standards of right and wrong too when it comes to stealing, murder, rape, selling drugs, child abuse and abduction, and such crimes are utterly abhorrent to all decent, moral people in the world, regardless of their own religious or political beliefs.

Eating people is wrong, wherever you come from.

It is a pity that the laws and cultures of certain communities do not always reflect the standards of right and wrong which most promise in public to uphold.

Sending birthday cards is not a very old custom.

Overeating can easily become a bad habit.

Why don’t we consider the wider aspects of the problem?

There’s an excellent view from my window.

The amount of work to be done seems to expand in proportion to the amount of time available to do it.

The percentage of income taken in tax has stayed the same for four years.

The nurses found what he said unintelligible, but his wife could understand him well enough.

People with gross physical disabilities are not necessarily unintelligent as well.

Euthanasia, even voluntary euthanasia, must always be a controversial subject.

It’s hard to teach someone who is habitually argumentative because they are thinking of how to disagree instead of paying attention.

The accommodation in the local inn was very comfortable indeed.

What kind of creature is a panda? — I think it’s a bear, but I’m not sure.

In her hand, the little girl held a small glass globe full of liquid, which gave the impression of a snowstorm when she shook it.

That young man is extremely intelligent, I think he will do very well at university.

Our view of life and the world is largely the product of the society we are born into.

According to the writer, the thoughts and ideas of an individual will often dominate the patterns and standards handed down in the community.

According to the writer, it is unlikely that a child born into one culture will acquire the customs and traditions of another.

Anthropologists can only study human societies objectively if they regard all cultures as having equal value.

We feel the inner workings of our brain to be worth investigating.

What is of first-rate importance is the predominant role of custom.

When we are intelligent about its laws, human life will become intelligible.

That’s how we have learned all we know about the laws of astronomy.

He sees it modified by a definite set of customs.

The study of custom can be profitable only after certain initial propositions have been accepted.

Scientific study requires that there be no bias towards one side.