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Source: *Ethics*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (Oct., 1970), pp. 22-35

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2380014>

Accessed: 28/05/2013 07:40

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# Social Norms and Aberrations: Violence and Some Related Social Facts

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I

Much excellent philosophical anthropology has shown that certain sorts of behavior must be considered unacceptable because incompatible with social cohesion. Violence, cruelty, rudeness, and other behavior which indicates lack of respect for persons tear at the fabric of society, and it may be supposed that for any group there is a point beyond which the accumulation of acts of violence, cruelty, or even rudeness, implies distintegration, below which point there is stability, and around which point crisis or an unsteady equilibrium exists. By a series of small and plausible transitions the putative empirical generalization, or regularity, represented in such terms may be transformed into a statement about the normative attitudes of persons in stable groups. The generalization may in the first place be more strongly construed as a statement of law governing any society. The weakening of bonds between persons implied by the prevalence of behavior of the kinds in question means that societies not only do not but cannot survive a certain excess of it. Such a natural law may in turn be reflected internally by certain regulations—civil laws and customs—prohibiting such behavior, or, more strongly, by internalized rules with which most persons not only act in accordance but also accept as stipulating what one ought to do or avoid. The observable frailty of social constitutions is thus reflected from within as a family of obligations—of differing strength depending upon the seriousness of the kind of behavior—to refrain from violence, cruelty, rudeness, and similar acts, at least so long as there are no alternative means to an important and justifiable end. Such behavior may have its place, but that place must be an unusual one, a situation involving imminent disaster or an intolerable condition responsive only to extreme measures. To pass from regulations to internalized rules in this way is to suggest that the essentially prudential considerations upon which reasonable regulations are based are reinforced by conceptual ones which make it impossible rationally to value violation

of such regulations. That such reinforcement occurs is undeniable, but it is not well understood why, or universally believed that, resistance to it is irrational.

A possible obstacle to understanding may be avoided by noting that the view summarized in the anthropological model just described and elaborated in what follows is not necessarily contrary to conflict theories of society, so long as these are interpreted in even vaguely plausible ways. There is no necessary disagreement or agreement, for example, with a Hegelian, ethological, or evolutionary view according to which there is a point below which ostensibly dysfunctional behavior must not fall if society is to avoid morbidity. The existence of such a point would not indicate the possibility of a transition from the necessity of such behavior to the encouragement of it, since, even if a detached philosopher or scientist could perceive the functionality of such behavior, it might well be considered deplorable by the major portion of the group involved. Émile Durkheim made a similar point in connection with criminal behavior, which he considered socially valuable but possibly abhorrent, without however discerning the moral dilemma incipient in this suggestion.<sup>1</sup> He also provided the material for a solution, though, in noting continual change in conceptions of the criminal. The possibility of different viewpoints about the same phenomenon suggests, in the light of the dilemma just mentioned, that one may abhor but not value what he considers criminal, whereas if one finds something valuable or necessary he cannot consider it criminal but only unlawful. In this way enlightened societies, recognizing the inevitability of "crime" in changing times but not wishing to encourage disrespect for law, may discard earlier conceptions of criminality and culpability and consider the lawbreaker a victim of unfortunate circumstance. Similarly, behavior which an external observer takes to be necessary violence may be otherwise described and regarded from within, so that there is no need to accept rules specifically enjoining behavior which indicates disrespect for others.

Such comments prompt two important questions. First, if the same behavior may be differently regarded from different viewpoints, how are criteria for the proper application of the relevant concepts to be determined? Second, even if acceptance of certain norms must characterize the dominant portion of society, this fact does not itself preclude aberrant values on the part of a minority. Is it not the case, therefore, that in spite of formidable social and psychological constraints, the sorts of behavior in question may be logically possible values of rational, though estranged, individuals? Preliminary answers may be given in terms of a distinction between "institutional" and "social" facts which indicates first, that the

1. See *The Rules of Sociological Method* (New York, 1964), pp. 65-73. Durkheim believed that crime is actually necessary to society in the same way that pain, though undesirable, is useful to the individual organism. The analogy suggests a different conclusion, however: It is not pain but sensitivity to pain which is necessary to the mature organism, not crime but the possibility of crime to the mature society.

concepts in question are primitive, so that criteria for their use cannot be exhaustively specified but must instead be simply given within a cultural context, and, second, that in spite of this evident relativity of evaluation certain categories of behavior cannot be coherently valued except as means to an end incompatible with them. Arguments similar to those to be employed here could also be used to show that the positive counterparts of such behavior—peaceableness, kindness, courtesy—are valued not as ends but as necessary means to what men naturally desire, but such arguments are indicated only in passing.

John R. Searle has recently developed a concept of “institutional facts” characteristic of games, like basketball, of practices, like promising, and of explicitly contractual relationships, like marriage, any of which can be defined in terms of rules which constitute them. Such rules typically have the form “such-and-such behavior counts as such-and-such an act under such-and-such conditions,” where those conditions can be specified exhaustively and give instructions for the identification of the act, or institutional fact, in question. The identification of such a fact thus depends upon certain understandings about how otherwise insignificant behavior (such as uttering the words “I do” or throwing a ball through a hoop) is to be regarded (as getting married or scoring, for example).<sup>2</sup> Because such facts can be perceived only within a context of shared or shareable interests, experiences, and expectations, they can appropriately be termed “social” as well as “institutional.” The two terms may also be used, however, to mark an important distinction, for the first is more widely applicable. Many social facts lack explicit definition in terms of constitutive rules. Such rules establish the criteria of identification for institutional facts in a given society, but criteria for the identification of other social facts may be far more elusive because the conditions under which such identification is to be made cannot be specified for these facts. The facts in question have to do not with the formalized behavior characteristic of isolable institutions but with that governed by attitudes vaguer, more important, and more pervasive than anything which can be codified in rule book or statute. They include such facts as violence, cruelty, rudeness, and a host of similar sorts of ordinarily unacceptable behavior together with their normal counterparts,<sup>3</sup> and they bear considerable resemblance to Durkheim’s social facts.<sup>4</sup> By including aberrations as well

2. See John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 50–53.

3. Even omitting mention of the positive counterparts of such behavior a full list would be quite long, and the examples used here are merely representative. Others include contempt, insolence, discrimination, brutality, savagery. The concepts also have formal similarities to such moral qualities as cowardice and intemperance and to the “aesthetic qualities” discussed by Frank Sibley in the article “Aesthetic Concepts,” *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959):421–50.

4. Durkheim, chap. 1.

as norms, however, the concept employed here weakens and blurs Durkheim's conditions of constraint and generality, which are obvious distillations from the concepts of importance and pervasiveness.

Justification of the distinction between social and institutional facts is provided by fuller discussion of the characteristic features of the former in the following section. Some of the important consequences of the distinction should be mentioned immediately. Whereas anyone who understands English can be enabled to recognize an institutional fact of an English-speaking people by being told the rules which constitute it, recognition of other social facts may be less simple. All that is required for recognition of an institutional fact is knowledge of the specified conditions under which certain overt behavior is regarded in a given group to constitute a certain act. Where such conditions are unspecifiable, however, recognition of a social fact may require the sort of understanding which is characteristic of integration with the group in question, and lacking which there is always an element of inference in characterizations of behavior. Moreover, even if an outsider has been told that certain behavior is rude, for example, he may be unable to consider it genuinely rude if his own criteria of such behavior differ, whereas if he knows the rules constitutive of some form of activity, such as marriage or promising, then he will recognize that to do certain things is genuinely to perform that activity. In the case of many social facts, in other words, one will have a tendency to speak not of what is so-and-so but of what is considered so-and-so, but one will require no such distinction in the case of institutional facts. Although similar institutions have different constitutive rules in different societies, the fact that such rules actually define institutional activities permits one to say not just that certain behavior is considered to constitute a certain activity, but that it does constitute it.

An important consequence of the difference between institutional and social facts is examined in what follows. It is clear that the ability to recognize an institutional fact does not presuppose acceptance of the values and obligations characteristic of the institution in question. The relatively circumscribed nature and easy identifiability of institutional facts permit detached observation and a distinction between observation and acceptance of the normative features of the facts in question. On the other hand, the assimilation with a group required in order to recognize social facts about the group indicates that such recognition does involve acceptance of the characteristic obligations and values. In virtue of lacking constitutive rules, certain social facts have a sort of unanalyzability which makes recognition of these facts incompatible with the kind of external attitude possible in the case of institutional facts. The logically primitive character of the concepts now to be discussed makes it possible to conclude that, although publicly recognizable institutions may be approved by some and disapproved by others, in no society can behavior publicly

recognized to be violent, cruel, or rude be the object of anyone's unqualified approval.<sup>5</sup>

## II

The terms "violent," "cruel," "rude," and the like have a dual application. They may be applied either to persons or to their actions, or, more generally, to individuals or to phenomena. It is an interesting question whether one can discern some priority of attribution here. Is it primarily persons and their actions which are properly characterized in these ways, so that talk of "violent storms," "cruel nature," or "the rude sea" amount to metaphorical extensions, or are matters reversed? Fortunately, the question is of no logical importance. One may with equal propriety apply the terms in question to physical objects, animals, men, species, societies, groups, and many other sorts of logical individuals, or to processes, events, performances, human actions, and other phenomena. It is this latter distinction between individuals and phenomena—marked grammatically by the difference between proper names and verbal nouns—which is the important one. Though abstract, it is serviceable if not abused, and in spite of present focus upon human beings and their behavior, points may often be made more clearly or gracefully in more generic terms.

It is not the same thing to say of individuals and of phenomena that they are violent, cruel, or rude. There is a significant epistemological priority in the attribution of such features to the latter. Correctly to describe a man as violent, cruel, or rude requires knowledge of that man's violent, cruel, or rude behavior; as a rule a man can be called violent only if he sometimes acts violently, and nothing can be called cruel or rude without an appropriate behavioral basis. Although saying that a person is cruel or kind requires reference to actions, however, so to describe someone is ordinarily not to describe an instance or instances of behavior but to ascribe a property to him in virtue of which he may behave in certain ways, a disposition to certain kinds of behavior. One's being temporarily and uncharacteristically kind does not justify ascription of a disposition any more than characteristic kindness precludes a latent disposition to cruelty.

Not always actions show the man: we find  
Who does a kindness, is not therefore kind;  
Perhaps prosperity becalm'd his breast,  
Perhaps the wind just shifted from the east.<sup>6</sup>

Pope's subsequently expressed skepticism is unwarranted, however. "Actions best discover man." Individuals are known through the behavior

5. Cf. John R. Searle, "How to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'," *Philosophical Review* 73 (1964): 43–58; and R. M. Hare, "The Promising Game," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 70 (1964): 398–412, both reprinted in Philippa Foot, *Theories of Ethics* (Oxford, 1967). Hare rightly objects to Searle's attempt to derive significant obligations from institutional facts, but his remarks cannot be generalized to social facts.

6. Alexander Pope, *Moral Essays*, I, lines 109–12.

they exhibit, and in this sense characteristics of phenomena are conceptually prior to, though often causally consequent upon, dispositions of individuals.

The significance of the distinction between predicates of phenomena and the associated predicates of individuals resides in a logical peculiarity of the former. They always function modally, signifying an interpretation of phenomena rather than a simple fact. The most trivial of examples indicate that phenomena, unlike individuals, do not, strictly speaking, possess properties. Water may be frozen and transparent but its freezing is neither, though the freezing or the being transparent may under certain circumstances be interesting or fortunate. A woman may be intelligent and her being intelligent may be important, but neither the woman nor her state may have the characteristic of the other. One may, of course, speak of "an important woman," but in any appropriate context such an expression can be readily paraphrased in terms of the phenomenon which accounts for this importance. If a woman is important because of her abilities, then she is a woman able to do important things.

It is evident from such examples that the "properties" of phenomena are broadly evaluative ones, reflecting interests and expectations of persons concerned with given circumstances. Whereas the ability to identify the properties of individuals is a function of the perceptual apparatus and interests common to a species, identification of characteristics of phenomena is not objective in this sense but depends upon narrower personal and social needs and concerns. Violence, cruelty, and rudeness would be extraordinary characteristics of phenomena if their ascription did not similarly depend upon a "way of existing," and there is no reason to think them unusual in this respect. If they were it could hardly be the case that what to some is violence on television may be "action" to others, what the childless may consider cruelty may be discipline according to parents, and what is rudeness in one circle may be entirely unremarkable in another.

That the predicates in question are interpretative rather than simply descriptive does not mean a lack of features common to instances of what fall under them. It does not mean that relationships between overt behavior and its characterization are completely extrinsic; not just any event may be surprising or interesting, not just any behavior may be regarded as violent, cruel, or rude. Violence must be potentially injurious or destructive, it is necessary that cruelty may cause suffering, and rudeness must be capable of giving offence; or at least what is characterized in one of these ways must be suggestive of one of the correlated possibilities. The interpretative nature of the predicates in question means simply that observable correlates amounting to necessary and sufficient conditions for what they denote are lacking.<sup>7</sup> Cases are easily imagined in which

7. Contrast Philippa Foot's attempt to provide a naturalistic account of the meaning of "rude" ("Moral Arguments," *Mind* 67 [1958]:507-9).



violence fails to yield injury, cruelty does not cause suffering, or rudeness cause offense, and the only necessary conditions governing the characterization of such behavior are possibilities which may not be realized in specific cases, although they must be realized regularly. Neither are there any conditions sufficient for the ascription of violence, cruelty, or rudeness, for injury, pain, and offense may result from any number of things different from such modes of behavior. The interpretative nature of the features in question assures the futility of a more thorough search for conditions which would furnish them with complete definitions. This result is corroborated by attention to the dispositional use of the terms in question, examined in more detail below, since disposition predicates are formally primitive terms.<sup>8</sup> The upshot of such considerations is simply that no adequate account of violence, cruelty, and rudeness can be entirely naturalistic, since these partially evaluative concepts can have no complete definitions in terms of "natural" properties. Instead, these considerations point to nonnaturalism, though to an empirical nonnaturalism which can guarantee considerable interpersonal agreement.

Such a claim must eventually be reconciled with one of the most interesting and significant features, noted above, of the concepts under discussion: the behavior which constitutes violence, cruelty, rudeness, and the like may be differently identified as a person's experience grows and expectations change. The manner of this reconciliation may be indicated at the same time as the tension between the claims is made more explicit.

Connected with the interpretative element in the identification of such modes of behavior is a relative scarcity or aberrance in such behavior. Ordinarily, wind is violent if it can topple trees and a crowd violent if its behavior can lead to broken windows or bloodshed, but if one were accustomed to high winds and expected crowds to become mobs, the events in question would be considered not violent but routine, as recent discoveries in astronomy have made solar processes once called violent now seem relatively benign. What one can consider normal because it is an ordinary part of his world can hardly be considered violent by him, however surprising the matter-of-fact attitude of those accustomed to brutish conditions may be to more fortunate strangers. Similarly, what passes unnoticed in ordinary society cannot be rude or cruel, even if the same behavior elsewhere would be. In general, comparative familiarity with a phenomenon obviates the need for any particular characterization of it. A newly discovered phenomenon may be surprising or interesting, but one becomes accustomed to it and ceases to regard it in such ways. Because the factors which determine the characterization of phenomena are typically aroused by unusual occurrences, normal states of affairs are undistinguished by such attention. It is not so much a matter of human psychology as of the necessarily selective nature of cognition that in an important

8. At least the unrestricted ones discussed here are primitive (cf. Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* [Indianapolis, 1965], pp. 46-49).



sense modes of phenomena exist only when recognized, and are recognized only if noteworthy. Significant modifications imply unusual circumstances. This is not, however, at all to deny the possibility of attributing normality to a situation. It is instead to say that such attribution may add nothing to what is expressed. If nothing distinguishes an action, then to say that it was done in a normal way, peacefully, civilly, or intentionally, adds nothing except the suggestion that the circumstances were or might have been peculiar, and if it is known that circumstances were not of this kind, to say of an action that it was intentional or of behavior that it was peaceable is objectionable only on grounds of triviality.<sup>9</sup>

Within an ordinary environment there should be agreement about such modifications. Indeed, even in quite different environments, kinds of cases involving basic human interests may be subject to much less difference in interpretation than is possible in principle. The fact that men are about equally concerned with and susceptible to injury and pain, for example, probably gives the words "violence" and "cruelty" a relatively stable core of application in spite of their logical characteristics. From within any given group generalizations about modes of behavior which suggest that words for them name phenomena are unlikely to yield confusion, and serious error is possible in principle only when judgments about violence, cruelty, or rudeness are attempted regarding other groups; but even in such cases criteria of violence, cruelty, and "natural" rudeness<sup>10</sup> probably tend to converge because human concern about injury, pain, and indignity is unusually persistent.

Nevertheless, in a hostile environment one may become inured to almost anything, including injury, and it is to be expected that what from a more favored standpoint is violent may fail to be so regarded by one raised in the midst of turbulence or social decay. One is reminded of an apocryphal reply by a ghetto dweller to a reporter inquiring about recent violence: "What violence?" This answer has ambiguous connotations, however. It may simply indicate imperviousness to conditions which other persons find uncomfortable and thus support the generalization that continued exposure to a mode of behavior diminishes sensitivity to it, but it may instead carry a threat of worse violence to come and thus seem to conflict with that generalization. Obviously, nothing prevents revolutionaries from advocating hostile behavior for the achievement of their goals, and the possibility of revolutionary violence, as well as sadistic or intentionally boorish behavior, requires amendment of the general thesis that predicates of phenomena imply rarity of the modification described. Nevertheless, the thesis is basically correct for unitary groups, and the alteration need not be made until discussion returns to peculiarities of divided societies and external viewpoints.

9. Contrast J. L. Austin's remark, "No modification without aberration," and the related discussion (*Philosophical Papers* [Oxford, 1961], pp. 137-38).

10. Cf. Foot, "Moral Arguments," p. 507.

In striking contrast to the rarity implied by attributions of modes of phenomena, the ascription of the same predicates to individuals implies an appreciable frequency of behavior of the kind in question. To say that someone is a violent, cruel, or rude man is to characterize him as disposed to behavior of certain kinds in certain kinds of situations, and the linguistic character of disposition terms implies that any situations to which they are properly applied are fairly often forthcoming. In general, a disposition is a tendency to manifest a certain characteristic in familiar situations rather than unusual ones. Iron is not one of the flammable substances though it will burn under extreme conditions; but if those conditions occurred often in human environments or were easy to achieve, iron would properly be called flammable. Similarly, the dispositions to violence, cruelty, and rudeness exist as a rule only if violent, cruel, or rude behavior is relatively easily evoked in the individual to whom it is ascribed, that is, only when the conditions for its manifestations are routinely achievable. Since this will ordinarily be the case only when such conditions are routinely achieved, the possession of such a disposition virtually requires a relatively high frequency of its manifestation. This is not, of course, a logical requirement. A glass object may be fragile without having ever manifested its fragility, and it may be conceivable that a man have a disposition to cruelty without ever having had a chance to act cruelly. Conjecture about unmanifested human dispositions is idle, however; because glass is a fragile substance it is unnecessary to test each glass object for fragility in order to know that it has that property, but men are not samples of stuff and must be known by their deeds.

These analytical considerations become significant for moral and social philosophy when the results are extended to include more complex individuals, such as groups or societies. A group or society, clearly, can manifest behavior of certain kinds only if some of its members do, and there can hardly be a social disposition to the kinds of behavior here under discussion without there being many individuals so disposed. Again, as in the case of dispositions of individual men, if a society has a disposition to violence or rudeness then a considerable manifestation of the associated behavior may be expected. Since it would seem that in such a state fragmentation is the inevitable result, a sufficiently pronounced social disposition to such behavior can be only a transient state of any society. A certain level of violence, for example, necessarily results in radical change; if it is not curbed, society is altered beyond recognition. There is surely such a level for cruelty or rudeness as well, and it is clear that such behavior cannot be the object of practical social ideals, for such ideals would subvert themselves.

There is, however, a far stronger and philosophically more interesting reason for which violence and the like are self-defeating than one which has recourse to specific anthropological necessities. Such appeals ignore a most important dimension of social facts, the one which permits societies

to accommodate even to what they have regarded as violence—so long as the behavior in question is destructive primarily of institutions rather than of material requirements for existence—by ceasing so to regard it. The concepts of violence, cruelty, and rudeness behave in such a way that if the activity falling under them becomes widespread without having immediately catastrophic consequences it will cease to fall under these concepts. This is explained by an evident antagonism between the two aspects of such concepts. The frequency of occurrence implied by possession of the disposition to such behavior conflicts in one important case with the scarcity of that behavior implied in attributing it to actual actions. Correct ascription of a social disposition to violence, cruelty, or rudeness implies a relatively general incidence of violent, cruel, or rude acts, but characterization of these acts in such ways implies the opposite. Because the distinction is reserved for phenomena which are relatively rare, commonplace acts—behavior characteristic of a significant segment of society rather than of isolated individuals—cannot in the society in question be considered aberrant for more than a limited period of time. This is the period, a generation or two, within which destructive tendencies, if uncorrected, result in irremediable damage to previous styles of life or within which attitudes toward these tendencies will have changed enough for the behavior in question to be integrated within other institutions and to be considered normal.

### III

Considerable substance may be given to these abstract results by comparing ascriptions of violence, cruelty, rudeness, and so forth, to societies from both external and internal points of view. What can it mean, for example, to say, “The ancient Assyrians were a violent people”? The sentence implies that the Assyrians frequently acted violently, which in turn implies that they could not have regarded their own behavior as violent. Such differences in attitude seem to imply factual error: one would expect violent cultures to be relatively unstable, which in many cases they are not. Such error is avoided only by recognizing that what one group considers violence in another may be perfectly compatible with the vigorous existence of the one to which it is ascribed because it does not in that society constitute violence. To characterize a society or group as violent may be either to indicate that the behavior of its members is such as to render the group inherently unstable or to acknowledge that such a state would be incompatible with the continued stability of the group from the standpoint of which the assessment is made. For any particular type of behavior, the society which considers it violent could not both have a disposition to that sort of behavior and survive unchanged, and in characterizing a foreign culture as violent one should be clear about whether the judgment concerns primarily the foreign culture or one’s own. It makes no sense to make such pronouncements as “all cultures have

known violence” unless this is to mean “in every society there has been behavior considered violent in it” or “every society has manifested behavior which would be violent in our society.” Similar points may be made about other judgments of apparent aberrations of behavior. Francis Bacon’s observation about “the Turks, a cruel people who nevertheless are kind to beasts”<sup>11</sup> is no less a reflection of English attitudes than a statement about Oriental behavior.

Explicit ascription of pathological states to one’s own society has its own interesting implications. Such ascription requires one to consider both many persons and much behavior to be violent, cruel, rude, or something similar, and in spite of the antagonism between such attributions to individuals and phenomena on a social scale this is clearly possible, though only in transitional times or unstable periods. It means that the relevant sorts of behavior have become frequent without yet being accepted as normal. It indicates an unstable or transitional period in which behavior previously unusual is still considered aberrant by many, and since such behavior conflicts with previously prevailing standards of acceptability, the correct judgment that certain behavior has become frequent expresses recognition that the situation is critical for the survival of a way of life. To put it more optimistically, so long as a substantial number of people can recognize that aberrant behavior is rife, the possibility that the behavior in question will not become normal remains; there exists the possibility of maximizing continuity of attitudes and institutions through correction of conditions conducive to such behavior. On the other hand, whereas a society can diagnose a state of crisis in this way, it probably cannot diagnose its disintegration. When behavior which would previously have been considered violent, cruel, or rude comes to be considered normal, attitudes must already have accommodated to its prevalence to such an extent that old institutions are almost certainly doomed.

For the short run the consequences are obvious. The moral convictions and social conventions of a society’s members weaken along with its institutions. If acts once thought aberrant have reached a frequency at which they can no longer be accorded the title reserved for phenomena which are relatively rare, then such behavior must cease to shock and a certain moral inertness ensue. The assassination of political leaders will produce the sadness natural to death but the anger appropriate to murder will be absent, and wars will be criticized because they are unsuccessful rather than because they are wrong. Cynicism is almost inevitable, and to an increasingly great extent behavior of a kind once abhorred becomes subject only to more pragmatic criteria of evaluation. Degeneration of moral attitudes toward the more serious aberrations, that is, inattention to

11. “Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature,” *Essays*, no. 13.

what was previously regarded as such, may thus provide a criterion of social or group decay.<sup>12</sup>

It is now possible to state succinctly what it is to advocate revolutionary violence, sadism, or boorishness. In advocating violence one may be speaking the language of the opposition, encouraging action which is so called by those under attack and which, because so called, indicates areas of vulnerability. The revolutionary need only realize that certain behavior is regarded in a way which indicates it cannot be tolerated by its victims and encourage it for that reason. Similarly, the sadist need not consider his behavior cruel so long as his victim does, and the efforts of the deliberate boor are repaid if he succeeds in getting others to find his behavior boorish. It is clear that descriptions of revolutionary violence, sadism, or deliberate boorishness are in a certain respect more complicated than cases involving purely external or purely internal attributions of violence, cruelty, and rudeness. A revolutionary situation, for example, implies antagonism between at least two groups within what is at least by law or custom a single community, but since the separation between groups may be only partial, an advocate of violence may employ the same criteria of such behavior as the enemy does. Such an advocate need not himself be violent, especially if he has rejected only some of the values of his old community. If, however, such a person practices what he preaches, he may find his action distasteful, however necessary. In like manner, one may have an intellectual love of cruelty or effrontery yet be personally admirable; or he may indulge his love and no one admire him, including himself. Such complications do not, however, affect the general result that predicates of behavior imply that, except in periods of disruption not more than a few decades in length, relatively few persons behave in the way indicated.

One philosophically interesting implication of these considerations is that it is conceptually impossible to value, or even universally prescribe, any of the dysfunctional patterns of behavior discussed here other than as a means to an end. Violence, cruelty, rudeness, and the like cannot coherently be considered valuable in themselves, and to encourage them for themselves would not be simply fanatical but incoherent. For what would the recommendation, "Seek violence, and follow it!" for example, amount to? It could not be to recommend behavior of a specific kind, since the behavior which constitutes violence is subject to change. It would instead have to amount to "whatever is considered violent, do that!" and this is tantamount to "seek the state where violence is the norm!" If violence were the norm, however, nothing would be considered particularly violent and the term would lack significant application. The point may be illustrated by means of an analogy. Compare the hypothetical value of

12. This paragraph is, by chance, a virtual précis of some remarks by Noam Chomsky ("Philosophers and Public Philosophy," *Ethics* 79 [1968]:1-2). See also J. M. Cameron, "The Ethics of Violence," *New York Review of Books* 15 (1970):24-32.

violence with an ideal of perfect mendacity. To urge that one always lie may be to urge one of two things—always to say what is false or always to deceive. In either case, though for different reasons, the recommendation frustrates itself. If everyone were to begin simply to say what is false, then after recovery from the initial shock, accommodation to the situation would be easy and automatic; the use of negatives would simply alter in such a way that everyone would in effect quickly come to be speaking the truth again. If on the other hand everyone attempted systematically to deceive his fellows in whatever way seemed best (including speaking the truth), the ensuing state of continual distrust would be incompatible with the conditions which make occasional deception possible; where there is no trust the question of deception can hardly arise. Similarly, to recommend violence may be simply to recommend that one attempt to harm one's fellows wherever possible, or it may be to recommend promotion of unmoderated civil strife. In the first case avoidance of quick extinction of the group would seem to require development of adequate means of personal protection, so that pursuance of the ideal would simply result in a new normalization. In the second case the concept of violence ceases to be a workable one, for in a state of continued actual strife the standards by which something can be judged to be aberrant are lacking. It is a conspicuous failing of many systems of moral philosophy that they ignore the implications of the social nature of many of the facts with which they deal. Hobbes, for example, while realizing that concepts not relevantly different from violence, cruelty, and rudeness are applicable only within social contexts, professed to believe that in a state of nature their opposites could be desired *in foro interno*.<sup>13</sup> In a state of actual conflict, however, natural laws lack descriptive content, and the most one could desire is avoidance of injury, suffering, and the like. Given only a disposition to conflict, on the other hand, there may be sufficient stability to make possible behavioral criteria for the terms of social facts. Doing so, however, presupposes a social (though not a political) order. The state of nature is simply a condition lacking the institutional facts characteristic of a political order; it is also a social state, the facts of which are not reducible to individual desires and aversions.

## IV

## CONCLUSION

To call behavior violent, cruel, or rude is, then, to imply that it has been relatively rare. To encourage a general disposition to violence, cruelty, or rudeness would be to urge that such behavior be frequent, and the success of the appeal would have the consequence that the behavior previously encouraged cease to be regarded in the original way; either social ties dissolve and men become accustomed to the life described by Hobbes or men accommodate to the new forms of behavior, institutionalizing them under such titles as "sport" and "affairs of honor" or

13. *Leviathan*, chap. 15.



otherwise legitimizing and rationalizing them as “daring,” “power,” and the like. In any case the antisocial character of the behavior is suppressed.

It is initially curious that substantially similar remarks must be made about the functional counterparts of aberrant modes of behavior, but in one respect the cases are importantly different. It is true that only the first part of the admonition to “seek peace, and follow it!” can be heeded for an extended period, for if what is regarded as peace were attained and sustained the term would cease to modify terms for individuals and phenomena significantly. The background of contrasting behavior which permits the word to be used in significant characterizations would be lacking. Rather than to say that the second imperative is incoherent, however, this is to say that it is trivial, proscribing only deviation from the norm, since terms which indicate a norm are only trivially applied to normal behavior. The crucial difference between peace, kindness, courtesy, and the like, and violence, cruelty, and rudeness, the one which dictates that the former are norms and the latter aberrations is, of course, that the former express cooperation and promote stability while the latter express animosity and promote destruction. Since instances of behavior of each kind constitute social facts, it is trivial that only facts of the former kind can correspond to social norms.

Peace, kindness, courtesy, and the like can no more be valued as ends than violence, cruelty, or rudeness; they are simply means for the avoidance of things—injury, suffering, offense—pursuance of which would make social relationships very unstable. For this reason there is no possibility that behavior which is at one time or place regarded as extremely violent, cruel, or rude be at another time or place regarded as perfectly peaceful, kind, or courteous. For although such assessments may vary through a considerable range, the need for reference to human harm prevents the purely formal structure of norms and aberrations sketched here from being interpreted in any arbitrary way. There may, indeed, come a day in which the defeat of peculiar social dogmas which divert attention from human similarities, and make men more tolerant of harm to themselves and others than need be the case, results in a common behavioral standard for already undeniable principles. By emphasizing the importance of improved perception of relatively brute facts, the results of this study are readily interpreted to express a strongly teleological view. Increasing recognition of the artificiality of many social distinctions should mean diminishing differences in the occurrence and identification of social facts from group to group, though room for social diversity may remain in the games societies play—the narrower institutional facts characteristic of individual societies. In this eventuality Bacon’s observation may be read as he intended it, as a comment not about nations and their idols but about the nature of man.