

“Civil liberty is the status of the man who is guaranteed by law and civil institutions the exclusive employment of all his own powers for his own welfare.”

–W. G. Sumner

Introduction

William Graham Sumner was a renowned philosopher of 19th century, one of the disciples of Herbert Spencer. He accepted and expanded many of the Spencer's social Darwinist ideas. He taught social sciences at Yale from 1872-1909.

W.G Sumner's early life and education

William Graham Sumner was born in Paterson New Jersey on October 30, 1840, the son of Thomas Sumner and Sarah Graham. Although not formally educated, his father was a supporter of free trade and temperance. When Sumner was eight his mother died, leaving him and his two siblings in the care of an affection-less stepmother. His parents stressed the values of sobriety, autonomy, and personal responsibility. These ideals had a significant influence on his direction and subsequent works

After graduating from high school in Hartford where he spent most of his childhood, Sumner attended Yale University and obtained his degree in 1863. He then went on to study in Germany, Switzerland, and at Oxford, where he prepared for the Episcopalian clergy. Sumner returned to Yale as a classics tutor from 1866-1869 and was ordained a minister of the Episcopal Church in July of 1869. This clash between his instincts of individual freedom and the necessary checks on “progress” became visible in some of his later writings. In 1871 he married Jeannie Elliott with whom he had three sons (one died in infancy). He spoke rarely of his wife and family, but his views on the value of monogamy and family are seen in his later writings. In

September of 1872, Sumner began a position as professor of political economy and social science at Yale. There he became part of the “Young Yale” movement, a reformist group opposing traditional classroom recitation. Sumner was one of the institution’s most popular and controversial teachers. He became an instrumental figure in the reformation of the American university system, from the old “divinity-classics” towards modernism.

Work and theories

In 1883 Sumner published “What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other”, an attack on attempts to regulate the economy and assuage social problems.

In his best-known encyclopedic book *Folkways* (1906), Sumner added the terms “folkways” and “mores” to the vocabularies of American sociologists. He believed that these were the most powerful influences on human behavior, even when irrational. A Social Darwinist and Conservative in thought, Sumner worked continuously in charting the evolution of human customs, folkways and mores. He believed that these forces, developed naturally through the course of evolution, made any attempts for social reform useless. Sumner advocated that humanity could only survive in an environment untouched by attempts to change the “natural laws of social development”. Trained in the ideals of inductive empiricism, Sumner’s concepts were based on observations of particulars. Sumner defined the concept of ethnocentrism, the attitudes of superiority concerning one’s own group in comparison to others.

Social Darwinism

He believed in Darwinism but all parts of it. Because, he thought society should be based on equal opportunity.

According to him, socioeconomic culture where someone is born doesn't matter, a man person can rise and is capable to do so and get wealthy.

He thought that wealthy people are easy way to distinguish between most determined, hardworking and lazy, not determined ones.

Those who are poor are due to their laziness and vice versa.

Opinion on public policy

1. Laissez-faire economy

As a classical economist, Sumner supported an extreme laissez-faire policy; he was in favor of free market economy. He thought that there shouldn't be any interference from government; they must let things work out at their own. He was of the view that,

1. Businesses has their own way to regulate themselves organically
2. Government intervention causes disruption in natural way of evaluation
3. In free market there is equal opportunity of becoming successful

According to Sumner, in this kind of market there is much role of intelligence. Ethics and determination and if someone puts effort he can become successful.

2. Tariffs

He despised tariffs, he proposed that,

1. Tariffs help some people more than others
2. Absence of equal opportunity
3. Producers, produce and sell at higher prices burden is put solely on consumers
4. Due to tariffs, wealthy people remain wealthy and poor have trouble gaining wealth

3. Gold standard

Because, it ensures stability to have gold standard and people have more trust in it, there should be gold standard.

4. Role of govt. in society

- Role of govt. in matters of society must be as little as possible
- He thought that role of govt. wasn't needed in many aspects of society such as free-market and limited govt.

He still acknowledged the for a govt. to exist

He was no-way a non-anarchist.(he thought govt. was needed to retain order in society) To gave citizens protection when needed.

He thought govt. should stick to political issues and give power of public operations to public.

Labor unions

He was against labor unions, he viewed them as monopolists who gather to get a raise in salary and disrupt the organic way of determining wages, he gave two reasons,

1. Businesses can determine themselves fair wages and working conditions. Because, People have right to choose where to work so, is their right to simply walk away if they believe that a certain company isn't compensating fairly.
2. They create uneven playing field. They force employers to raise the wages and it hurts the one not getting the raise.

This gave unfair advantage to labor unions, Sumner believed.

Gender equality

He was of the view that there should be equality in society keeping in view the suffrage of women. Divorce laws must be more liberal. Basis of this was that govt. has no right to interfere in personal lives

All people including women are capable of making their own choices, they're independent and could do what is best for themselves.

Social change

According to him, social change was against human nature, he said if someone would try to change humans would straight away ignore the change altogether.

Religion

He deeply regarded religion, he actually went to college to become part of clergy. . He served as a minister in the Church of the Redeemer in Morristown, New Jersey from 1870-1872, where he struggled with the conflicts between religion and scientific positivism.

Throughout his professorship as social science teacher religion was deeply rooted into him. His views of equal opportunity could be seen from bible from following verse " God doesn't favor any person or group of people".

His views regarding gender equality are also influenced by his religious approach.

Early American sociologist William Graham Sumner was the first to write about the distinctions between different types of norms in his book *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* (1906). Sumner created the framework that sociologists still use. The folkways are "Right ways" to meet various situations of our daily routine.

1.Folkways

Folkways are the rules of eating, drinking; meeting and departing, types of dressing, ceremonies and rituals for different situations, and the manners of life in institutional situations as family, school, market, and mosque. Some examples of folkways from our Pakistani culture are given. As Salam allikum, and responding waalaikum salaam, shaking hands and embracing while meeting, saying Khuda Hafiz or Fi-Amanillah while departing. On the violation of folkways the order of the society is not endangered. It does not create any serious problem.

ii. Mores: The essential characteristics or customs and conventions of a society or community. Mores are stricter than folkways they structure the difference between right and wrong. People feel strongly about mores. On the violation of mores norms we would face many problems, and disgracing manners of people. Religious doctrines are an example of mores that govern social behavior. Stealing and drinking bear are also the examples of mores.

iii. Taboos: A taboo is a very strong negative norm it is a prohibition of certain behavior that is so strict that violating it results in extreme disgust and even expulsion from the group or society. It is abnormal behavior of people and the next level of mores. For instance, in some Muslim cultures, eating pork is taboo because the pig is considered unclean. At the more extreme end, incest and cannibalism are both considered taboos in most places. If anyone violate these norms there is no space for that person in the society.

iv. Laws: Laws are norms that are formally inscribed at the state or federal level and is enforced by police or other government agents. We face some punishment for their violation. Laws exist to discourage behavior that would typically result in injury or harm to another person, including violations of property rights. Those who enforce laws have been given legal right by a government to control behavior for the

good of society at large. When someone violates a law, a state authority will impose a sanction, which can be as light as a payable fine or as severe as imprisonment. To break the traffic signal is the example of laws.