THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

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PREFACE

Anyone who is concerned with the applications of psychology becomes convinced that the mental life of an individual cannot be understood without taking into account the social environment in which the individual lives. The fashion of one's clothes and the form of one's religion, with all the intermediate social adjustments, such as methods of communication and methods of coöperation in industry, are dictated by the customs and traditions of the group. The author of this book became convinced of the necessity of studying social contributions to mental life when preparing a volume on psychology for teachers in 1903. The foundation for his thinking was undoubtedly laid by the teachings of Wilhelm Wundt, whose lectures and volumes on social psychology constitute the most elaborate contributions which have ever been made in this field.

The chapter on the alphabet in the present book is a reworking of one of the chapters in the book of 1903. The chapter on number is an extension of the corresponding chapter in the earlier work.

In the interval since 1903, the author has canvassed the substance of this volume from time to time in advanced courses on social psychology and has incorporated some portions of the material into articles and discussions in the field of educational psychology. It is his belief that the principles here laid down have broader applications than they can find in a volume on education; he has therefore

prepared the general statement which appears in this book both as a foundation for his further writings in educational psychology and as a suggestion of a basic method for other social sciences.

It remains to acknowledge obligations to the publishers and authors who have kindly permitted the use of quotations from their books. Acknowledgments are made in full in footnotes throughout the text. The publishers who have given permission to quote are as follows: D. Appleton & Company; Cambridge University Press; Chapman and Hall; Doubleday, Page & Company; Encyclopædia Britannica; Ginn and Company; Ingersoll Watch Company; Longmans, Green & Company; John W. Luce & Company; The Macmillan Company; Methuen & Company; Oxford University Press; G. P. Putnam's Sons; G. Schirmer, Inc.; Walter Scott Publishing Company; Charles Scribner's Sons; Trübner & Company.

C. H. J.

February, 1926.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to concentrate attention on the fact that social influences are of the highest importance in determining the character of human thought and conduct. Respect for property, industry, devotion to systematic daily routine, and all the other virtues which distinguish civilized man from his savage ancestors have been achieved through long generations of community life. These are not traits which belong to untrained human nature. Individuals exhibit, to be sure, even in civilized communities, many characteristics which are due to their personal inheritances, but inherited traits are modified and in some cases wholly transformed by the demands of society.

Emphasis on the social forces which operate to determine the course of human development has not been common in treatises on psychology. The reason is that an individual's organs of sense and an individual's habits are so concrete and readily accessible to the student of mental life that they have pushed the apparently abstract concepts of social consciousness and collective will into the background. Present-day psychology is in the main a psychology of the

individual. Even where social tendencies come under consideration it is the custom to attribute them to certain so-called instincts such as gregariousness, communicativeness, and gang spirit. These instincts are described as personal traits which all men bring into the world through inheritance and out of which in some mysterious fashion spring nations and languages and codes of morals.

The attempt will be made in the pages which follow to develop a system of psychology which will show that social consciousness instead of being something vague and intangible is one of the most active and potent facts in the world. Social consciousness expresses itself in certain institutions which are quite as real as the individual's habits and organs of sense. Language, for example, is such an institution. It is the product of long ages of cooperative effort. It is not the expression of an individual's instincts. The individual is indeed equipped by inheritance with vocal and auditory apparatus, but this native equipment is used by the American child in one way and by the Chinese child in a very different way. The particular institutional form which language has assumed in any given country cannot be explained without taking into account the united contributions of a great many intelligences.

It is a striking fact that the scientific study of language has treated this institution as though it were a concrete reality detached from the human minds which gave it birth. Philology has traced the history of words and formulated the laws of syntax and in so doing has very largely omitted all mention of the minds which use words and sentences as means of controlling thought and action.

What is true of language is even more true of such economic institutions as money and credit. The economists write about the various materials which have been used as mediums of exchange, about movements of gold, and

about the laws which govern values. In all their writing they make little or no reference to the human desires and interrelations which brought money into being and have directed its evolution. Nor do they carry their science far enough to show the influence of money on human intellectual and emotional life. They ignore the fact that it has become a powerful social force reacting on the individual and determining in large measure his thinking and behavior.

What is needed in order that we may arrive at a more adequate understanding of human beings and of the social and economic world in which they live is a psychology which gives equal consideration to institutions and individuals. The present volume will not undertake to discharge the comprehensive task of expounding such a complete science. A somewhat specialized treatment of a few of the social institutions will be attempted in order to exhibit the methods of this branch of psychology and more especially for the purpose of indicating certain practical applications which grow directly out of the discussion of social institutions.

Throughout this book the term "social institution" will be used in a broad way to cover all those accumulations of social capital which have been produced in the course of community life. For example, the word "institution" covers the fact that by combined effort men have produced tools. The modern world of technical devices is just as truly an exhibition of social intelligence as a blow with the fist is a concrete manifestation of the way in which a human nervous system reacts. The tools which man has invented are powerful influences in determining the course of civilized life. Through the long ages while man has been inventing tools and learning to use them, his mode of individual reaction has been undergoing a change. He is no longer absorbed in direct attack on the prey which fur-

nishes him food. He does not develop more skill in the use of claws and teeth in order that he may cope with his environment. He has adopted an indirect mode of action. He uses instruments which he has devised or borrowed from his forefathers or from his neighbor. Tools have become a part of his world. They are as real and as important as climate and trees and other facts of nature which are produced without the aid of human intelligence.

Other institutions are less material in their character. Government, for example, is the device which social intelligence has evolved to direct and check human behavior so that there shall be harmony within the group. Government is not made of wood and metals, as are tools, but it is a real fact in the world. To think of the strength of individual muscles as a phenomenon important to a science of psychology and to think of the strength of government as something quite abstract and negligible is seriously to invert values. Government is the embodiment of the experience of the race in a system of regulations and practices which have accumulated through centuries and have acquired a kind of independent reality which justifies their recognition as entities distinct from the material world and distinct from individuals, but no less significant than these tangible concrete realities.

Other examples of what is meant by the word "institutions" will be presented in the course of later chapters. For our present purposes it is enough to indicate that the type of psychology which is to be presented in this volume is one which may properly be described as the psychology of social institutions.

CHAPTER II

Tool Consciousness

It has been the practice of historical anthropology to designate the successive steps of civilization by the names of the materials used in making weapons and tools. Thus the earliest ages are called stone ages; later came ages of bronze and of iron; our own age is often spoken of as the age of steel. Another method of classifying epochs in human evolution is by reference to the predominant industry. There was a period when men supplied themselves with food chiefly by hunting. Later came agriculture and herding and finally manufacture.

These methods of classifying different stages of civilization have the virtue of being based on objective facts. One can readily determine by an examination of the remains found in caves and on the sites of ancient villages what materials man was using in the construction of his implements. There is, however, a disadvantage in emphasizing material facts and regarding these as the typical facts in human history. The truth is that man of the stone age was limited to the use of stone because his experience had not yet reached the state where he was acquainted with metals. The physical world contained metal in the stone age even as it does to-day. Metal did not come into human life until man devised methods of securing and using it. The student of anthropology, in noting the transition from stone to bronze, is not dealing merely or chiefly with a

physical reality; he is dealing with a change in human experience.

The statement can perhaps be put in its most striking form by pointing out that the animals never make any tools even though they can see stone quite as readily as could primitive man. It is not the objective material which suggests the construction of tools; the invention of tools depends on the inner subjective recognition of the possibility of using stone in a new way. A stone implement is the creation of man's genius, not a material fact.

The same kind of a statement can be made with regard to the evolution of industry. Man was at first a hunter. As such, his experiences and his emotions were little different from those of the animals which live by the capture of prey. He sought as food that which nature offered him. Gradually he evolved the attitude of looking into the future and of seeing the advantages of deliberate domestication of animals and of cultivation of the soil. His foresight transformed his mode of life. He substituted for dependence on wild game the patient coöperative modes of life which have led to the accumulation of that which will support life in greater comfort or that which in the aggregate we call wealth. Wealth has in turn reacted on its possessors until an entirely new world has been set up. This world has its material side — one can see wealth and handle it, but its origin was mental and directly traceable to the inner thought processes of men.

Let us turn from such general considerations to the study of the details of the evolution of tools. The archæologists tell us that long periods of time were consumed in achieving the first successes in mechanical invention. Man did not suddenly break away from the animal method of behavior. When an animal attacks an enemy or removes an obstacle from its path, its behavior is of a simple, direct type; it uti-

lizes its paws or teeth and its direct nervous and muscular energy. Such was also the behavior of primitive man. He used his hands and teeth backed by his personal strength. He did not think, as modern man does, of the possibility of utilizing some object to reinforce his own muscles. The use of levers and sharp weapons came very gradually.

The psychological analysis of what went on in these early stages can be introduced by a description of the pattern of consciousness which appears when a man or an animal deals directly with an object of his desire without the use of any tool. One can draw on personal experience for such a

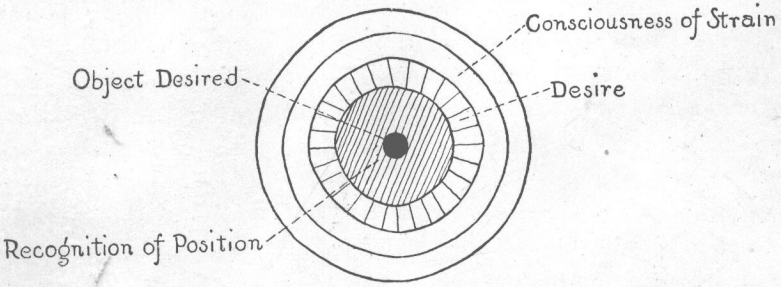

FIG. I. — THE FIELD OF CONSCIOUSNESS WITH A SINGLE CENTER OF ATTENTION

description. Each of us is constantly reaching out with his hands to grasp some object. At the center of attention is the visual experience of the thing desired. Second, there is present in consciousness a recognition of the direction and distance through which the hand must be moved. Third, there is the desire for the object. Surrounding these conspicuous and clearly recognizable elements of consciousness is a background of feelings and sensations which come from the whole organism and constitute the mental stage on which the act is performed. Figure I represents roughly the field of consciousness during one of these direct experiences. At the center is a dark spot represent-

ing the visual impression of the object. Around this center are lighter circular areas standing for the recognition of the position of the object and the desire to possess it; and finally beyond these lie a series of circles representing the experiences of strain and effort which make up the total mental situation.

If we try to picture the situation which appears when a simple tool is used, we find it necessary to elaborate the figure by introducing two centers of attention. The actor

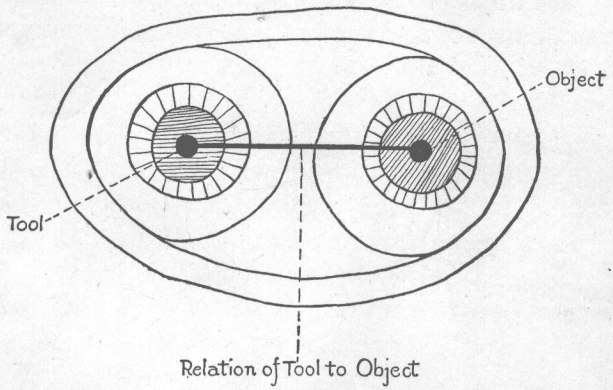

FIG. II. — THE FIELD OF CONSCIOUSNESS WITH TWO CENTERS OF ATTENTION

must still give heed to the object of his desire. He must at the same time grasp the tool and consciously direct its movements. Part of his attention will have to turn to this new center of experience. As he grasps the tool, he will have sensations in his hand of a type wholly different from the visual sensations which come from the object of his desire. As he moves the tool toward the object, there will have to be enough attention given to the relation between the two materially to increase the complexity of the pattern of consciousness. Figure II indicates the double character of attention in this case.