

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

AN OUTLINE AND SOURCE BOOK

BY

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New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1921

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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO
SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

To

MY HONORED CO-LABORER

FRANKLIN HENRY GIDDINGS

BOLD SEEKER AND VALIANT PROCLAIMER OF TRUTH

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

PREFACE

IT requires some hardihood to put forth this, the pioneer treatise, in any language, professing to deal systematically with the subject of social psychology. In spite of infinite pains and thirteen years of experience in university teaching of the subject, I feel sure this book is strewn with errors. The ground is new, and among the hundreds of interpretations, inferences, and generalizations I have ventured on, no doubt scores will turn out to be wrong. Of course I would strike them out if I knew which they are. I would hold back the book could I hope by longer scrutiny to detect them. But I have brought social psychology as far as I can unaided, and nothing is to be gained by delay. The time has come to hand over the results of my reflection to my fellow-workers, in the hope of provoking discussions which will part the wheat from the chaff and set it to producing an hundred fold.

Nothing puts an edge on one's thinking like coming on new and interesting truth mixed, nevertheless, with some error. Therefore, if the young science is to advance rapidly, its friends must not be too fearful of being found wrong on a few points. Let each prospector — to change the metaphor — empty out his sack of specimens before his brother prospectors, even though he knows their practised glance will recognize some of his prized nuggets as mere pyrites. Then it will not take long to locate the rich veins.

So I offer this book with the wish that what in it is sound be promptly absorbed into the growth of the science, and the unsound be as promptly forgotten. Indeed, the swiftness of its disintegration will measure the rate of progress of the subject. If it is utterly superannuated in twenty years, that will be well; if, in ten years, it is a back number, that will be better. Perish the book, if only social psychology may go forward! Hence, I beg messieurs, the discreet critics, to lay on right heartily, remembering that in showing its errors they are triumphing *with* the author, not *over* him.

At the moment of launching this work, I pause to pay heartfelt homage to the genius of Gabriel Tarde. Solicitous as I have been to give him due credit in the text, no wealth of excerpt and citation can reveal the full measure of my indebtedness to that profound and original thinker. While my system has swung wide of his, I am not sure I should ever have wrought out a social psychology but for the initial stimulus and the two great construction lines — conventionality and custom — yielded by his incomparable *Lois de l'imitation*. If only this expression of my gratitude could reach him!

EDWARD ALSWORTH ROSS

MADISON, WISCONSIN,
May, 1908.

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Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

SOCIAL psychology, (as the writer conceives it) studies the psychic planes and currents that come into existence among men in consequence of their association. It seeks to understand and account for those uniformities in feeling, belief, or volition — and hence in action — which are due to the interaction of human beings, *i.e.*, to *social* causes. No two persons have just the same endowment. Looking at their heredity, we should expect people to be far more dissimilar and individual than we actually find them to be. The aligning power of association triumphs over diversity of temperament and experience. There ought to be as many religious creeds as there are human beings; but we find people ranged under a few great religions. It is the same in respect to dress, diet, pastimes, or moral ideas. The individuality each has received from the hand of nature is largely effaced, and we find people gathered into great planes of uniformity.

In shifting attention from the agreements in which men rest, such as languages, religions, and cultures, to the agitations into which they are drawn, it is natural to change the metaphor from *plane* to *current*. The spread of the lynching spirit through a crowd in the presence of an atrocious criminal, the contagion of panic in a beaten

Social Psychology treats of social planes and currents

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