

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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PREFACE

Probably every writer who attempts a psychological analysis of society finds himself baffled by the complexity and ramifications of the subject. His effort, no matter how limited its initial scope, presently takes him far afield, so that he inevitably faces the alternative of skimming lightly over the surface of the whole domain, or penetrating it more thoroughly at the sacrifice of comprehensiveness. It is partly for this reason, no doubt, that books on social psychology are characterized by such conspicuous differences of treatment. Not only do they present conflicts of theory; they exhibit an astonishing disagreement in the range of special topics chosen for discussion. Some are essentially sociological in their point of view, and employ psychological concepts only as a foundation, or scaffolding, or occasional tools of construction. One of the leading works on the subject analyzes at painstaking length the fundamental social reactions of the individual, but says little about social institutions. Some attach profound explanatory importance to concepts of instinct and imitation; others minimize their significance. Numerous topics which are considered exhaustively in one are omitted altogether in another. Hence the writer who proposes to add to the list of systematic expositions of social psychology finds himself agreeably free to follow his own bent, but also somewhat uncomfortably lacking authoritative guidance.

On the whole, however, we may discern certain important trends which tend to give definitive form to the subject. One is the penetrating analysis of the mind of the

individual in order to determine the sources of social relationship. Second, the emphasis upon instinct is diminishing, especially in the consideration of human society, and there is increasing recognition of the far-reaching significance of processes of learning. Third, we may observe a gradual concurrence in the topical lines of treatment. Certain traditional ideas are becoming firmly established, and certain newer ones appear to have come to stay. For the present, therefore, the task of social psychology is partly that of synthesis and organization, and such is the purpose of this book. Its aim is to give an elementary but comprehensive and systematic presentation of social consciousness and social behavior.

Its distinctive features, in the opinion of the writer, are its explicit statement of the nature of higher and lower levels of social process, and its emphasis upon thought as a supremely important social function. With regard to the concept of instinct, this seems still to have a place in the psychology of human society. The controversy over it, indeed, appears to be largely due to the ambiguity of the term. If it is taken to signify a complicated series of reflexes, unlearned but accurately adapted to a particular type of situation, its application hardly extends to human experience. If, however, it is used to indicate certain in-born emotional interests and dispositions to learn the essential ways of human life—and such is one of its traditional meanings—we may continue to employ it in exposition of the nature of human behavior. In any case we should beware of the critical assumption that instinct and learning are not only antithetical terms but mutually exclusive processes. Here as elsewhere nature combines that which we separate by logical abstraction.

As to the social function of thought, it is puzzling to observe how lightly most writers appear to estimate its

social value, or how determinedly they attempt to reduce it to mechanical association of ideas or even to an accumulation of psychophysical reflexes. Some ignore it altogether; others take little account of it except to note its "rationalizations." In view of the profoundly pervasive part played by reflection in the organization and development of society this inadequate recognition can hardly be justified. The explanatory importance of thought surely deserves more respectful consideration. Along with our analysis and criticism, let us not lose sight of the fact that thinking, in various forms running all the way from simple representative imagery and reflective judgment to the tremendous constructions of contemporary science, has been the leading agency of social progress.

At a time when social psychology, like other branches of the general subject, is growing rapidly along lines of experimental and statistical investigation, not to mention physiological and pathological inquiry, case histories, and the like, there remains a need, I suppose, for repeated systematic restatements of the subject-matter covering the whole field. If it is not to become hopelessly bifurcated as an esoteric scientific discipline on the one hand, and a mass of popular trivialities and superstitions on the other, there must be persistent literary effort to present its principal features in readable and reliable form. I have been guided at many points by the technical investigations, and have made such use of their results as I could in my exposition, but my main purpose has been to give the elementary student and general reader a comprehensive account which he can understand, an account which may serve as a background for appreciation of the strictly scientific advances of the subject.

The book owes much to the texts on social psychology by Ross, McDougall, Gault, Allport, Dunlap, Bernard,

and others. My debt is greatest to McDougall and Allport, who seem to me conjointly, in spite of their radical differences of opinion, to have thrown most light on the subject. I have tried to weave their ideas into a unitary synthesis of my own.

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PART I
FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

CHAPTER I

DEFINITION, SCOPE, AND RELATIONS

Subject Matter and Definitions.—Man, as was observed long ago, is essentially a social animal. Like most of nature's creatures he passes his days in conscious relation to others of his kind. By inborn disposition and imitative habit he belongs to groups in which he lives and moves and has his being. Family, friends, church, club, business and professional associations determine to an overwhelming extent the character of his daily life. Almost everything he does has explicit or implicit reference to someone else; astonishingly few indeed are the actions which may be understood apart from such reference. Not only his conflicts and coöperations but also his apparently self-centered performances, such as dressing, eating, and reading, ordinarily involve associates, real or imaginary, present or prospective. One peruses a book, for example, with a subconscious feeling of being addressed by the author, or writes pages to a distant acquaintance, or to an actual or fancied public. A cry of pain usually has some social tinge of appeal; a laugh expresses sympathetic enjoyment, or embarrassment, or ridicule. So, too, work and play, education, art, worship, all are normally conducted with more or less awareness of and relation to our fellow men.

Social psychology has been well defined as "the scientific study of the social nature and reactions of the mind."¹ In other words, it attempts to describe and explain social

¹ Bogardus, *Social Psychology*, p. 14.

behavior in terms of mental processes. It shows precisely what mental traits are included in the term "social," how these traits are produced by various causes, and how they give rise to various forms of social activity. In its widest scope it comprehends "the study of both the social aspects of the individual mind, and the mental aspects of association." ²

This double objective is found in all the more important treatments of the subject. There is a difference of emphasis, however. Some writers assume, with comparatively little analysis, an equipment of social tendencies within the individual, and proceed to exhibit group phenomena as the expression of these tendencies. Thus in some of the earlier discussions the principle of imitativeness was taken as the explanation of the most varied forms of social behavior. Latterly a more complex mental outfit has been postulated, but still in many instances the writer's effort is mainly to present the facts of group behavior rather than to make an analytic study of the mental principles underlying these facts. Such a study constitutes the other and perhaps the dominating psychological trend within the subject. Here the central aim is to discover in the nature of the individual the sources of his social reactions. Accordingly, Allport defines social psychology as "the science which studies the behavior of the individual in so far as his behavior stimulates other individuals, or is itself a reaction to their behavior; and which describes the consciousness of the individual in so far as it is a consciousness of social objects and social relations." ³

The distinction between the two points of view and directions of emphasis is not merely verbal. In psychologizing upon the phenomena of the crowd and mob, for

² Ellwood, *Social Psychology*, p. 4.

³ Allport, *Social Psychology*, p. 12.

example, one may describe the emotional and violent behavior, the abeyance of reason, the quick shifts of attention, and so on, with no more explanation than a reference to "suggestion" as the underlying cause, and only casual or illustrative indication of the individual member of the group. On the other hand, one may inquire closely into the psychophysical traits of the individual which give rise to such mass action, and so may obtain a profounder understanding of the fact. Similarly many other features of social life may be presented objectively with more or less psychological flavor in the account, or may be traced to their roots in the nature of the individual. Of course any really scientific statement combines the two methods in some degree.

The contemporary movement in social psychology began by paying special attention to the inborn traits of animal and human nature on which the social life of a species is based. Much of this life, indeed, must be regarded as fundamentally instinctive, for though the precise meaning of the term "instinct" is still in question, it is none the less certain that social dispositions and tendencies are to some extent innate. In mankind they are subjected to a long process of education, both casual and deliberate, which serves further to socialize the individual. Hence the task of social psychology is not only to discover the fundamental factors of society in the constitution of the mind, but also to show how these are developed into the modes of civilization. According to McDougall's profound conception, "social psychology has to show how, given the native propensities and capacities of the individual human mind, all the complex mental life of societies is shaped by them and in turn reacts upon the course of their development and operation in the individual." And again, "the fundamental problem of

social psychology is the moralization of the individual by the society in which he is born as a creature in which the non-moral and purely egoistic tendencies are so much stronger than any altruistic tendencies.”⁴ Accordingly the psychologist is interested especially in the social influences which are brought to bear casually or deliberately upon the individual with the effect of determining his behavior.

Let us understand, then, that social psychology studies the traits of mind which underlie social life, describes them in detail, explains them by reference to heredity and environment, ascertains the laws of their operation in groups, and is thus enabled to some extent to predict and control behavior. The study concerns itself chiefly with mankind, but finds in the social life of lower animals many interesting and significant phenomena which afford clues to the understanding of their overlord. To put the matter concretely, the psychologist here investigates the innate propensities and acquired habits which relate living creatures to one another as members of groups. He examines such traits as pugnacity, family affection, domination and obedience, spontaneous association and reflective organization, examines them in their primitive and developed forms, and reveals their operation in the complex life of civilized man. In this way he obtains a better understanding of society, of the behavior of crowds, audiences, and legislative assemblies, of fashion, custom, and public sentiment, of political, industrial, and religious movements, than would otherwise be possible. He treats all social activity as the expression of individual traits which are themselves products of heredity and environmental influence.

The Study of Society.—Social psychology is the culminating phase of a long development of reflection upon the

⁴ McDougall, *Social Psychology*, 1917, p. 18.

nature of society, a development which has included mythology, proverbial morality, ethics, history, political science, economics, and sociology as its principal stages and departments. Since it is always profitable to view a subject in its historical perspective, let us note briefly a few leading features of this development.

We find little scientific inquiry into the essential nature of society before the beginning of the last century. The earliest reflections upon it were mainly mythological and religious; they were concerned with the mystery of its origin and with pressing problems of everyday social life. They are interesting, however, as revealing the power of imagination in this field, and also here and there a subtle understanding of human nature.⁵ The super-human ancestry of the tribe, its origin in some generative process of nature, its solidarity in relation to its deities and its neighbors, its methods of protecting and sustaining itself by placating its gods or magically controlling the mysterious forces of nature—such notions were woven into the mental fabric of primitive man. At a later stage ancient literature is sprinkled with observations about human nature, and there is an abundance of discourse concerning good and bad conduct. The moral wisdom of antiquity is imperishable. It is a striking fact that whereas our natural science for the most part is of very recent origin, the moral truths by which we live were discovered and clearly enunciated thousands of years ago. On the whole, however, the ancient point of view was distinctly unscientific. Religious or moral purpose forestalled any purely intellectual description and explanation of the facts.

The development of ethics has pointed toward social psychology. Beginning with thoughtful inquiry into the

⁵ Is the myth of the sowing of the dragon's teeth, from which sprang armed men, a forecast of the idea that society is essentially pugnacious?

nature of good and evil, and the significance of moral distinctions which were observed to be widely variant among different peoples, the study led through a wilderness of speculation and controversy to a scientific definition of moral consciousness in mental terms, and the discovery of its basis in social relations. Incidental to this development was that impressive series of literary efforts to depict an ideal society—Plato's *Republic*, St. Augustine's *City of God*, Bacon's *Atlantis*, More's *Utopia*, and others, magnificent pictures of a supposedly perfect social order.

The social sciences also present a background for the psychological analysis of society. History has always been enlivened by appreciation of the mental relationships which have motivated the social drama of the past. Treatises on government, from Aristotle's *Politics* down, have necessarily taken account of the social constitution of the mind. Economics has likewise shown a psychological cast in its emphasis upon desires, arising in a group environment, as the causes of behavior and basis of economic relations.

Sociology has exhibited from the outset a pronounced psychological trend. In the systematic foundation of this subject the leading writers, August Comte and Herbert Spencer, explicitly acknowledged the part played by the mind in the constitution of the social order. Comte regarded sociology as the crowning achievement of the long development of science which began centuries ago with mathematics, and passed successively through astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology, to the investigation and reconstruction of human society. Further, by distinguishing science from prescientific modes of explanation, *i.e.* the reference of occurrences to supernatural beings and mysterious forces, he indicated clearly the