THE STUDY OF SOCIETY

METHODS AND PROBLEMS

Edited by
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PREFACE

There is to-day widespread recognition of the fact that the future of human civilization depends to a high degree upon Man's capacity to understand the forces and factors which control his own behaviour. Such understanding must be achieved, not only as regards individual conduct, but equally as regards the mass phenomena resulting from group contacts, which are becoming increasingly intimate and influential. Everyone pays lip-service to the vital necessity for a vigorous development of ' social science '. Yet when ardent investigators, not satisfied by general exhortation and advice, ask, " What shall we do ? " and " How shall we do it ? ", few serious attempts are made to answer them. This lack of detailed guidance is perhaps least marked in economics and in the field of vital statistics ; it is certainly most marked in the specifically human sciences of psychology, social anthropology, and sociology. Nowhere have these three sciences been properly mobilized to deal with the social problems which yearly grow more pressing.

In the summer of 1935 three members of the group responsible for this book met at Cambridge to discuss informally what steps could be taken to direct the application of the more reliable methods of psychology, anthropology, and sociology to a study of the problems of complex societies. Many plans were considered. Eventually it was decided to attempt to bring together a small number of psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists who were known to be actively interested in the social implications of their respective fields of work.

It must be stated that no effort was made, then or later, to organize a large or completely representative group. The view adopted was that if genuine progress is to be achieved, free, frank, and exhaustive discussion and criticism are essential. Such a method can be adequately exploited only in a group small in numbers, all the members of which are closely interested in or engaged upon research in one of the branches of knowledge concerned.

The plan found a ready and eager response. A preliminary meeting was held in November, 1935, and the group has met for

discussion twice a year since. From the beginning it was agreed that the first and most urgent need was for a survey of existing methods, contributions, and problems, which might help prospective laboratory and field workers in complex societies in much the same way as *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, first published by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1874, had assisted the field worker in anthropology. This was the idea which inspired the preparation of the present book.

The volume is addressed mainly to those who are engaged upon, or who wish to engage upon, social research, and who require to know what methods are already available, upon what established conclusions they may reasonably build, and what are some of the outstanding problems which might immediately repay further study. The employment of many of the methods described obviously demands specialized training. At the same time it is recognized that invaluable services can be rendered by persons who have had little opportunity to obtain technical instruction, and at various points in the book attempts have been made to indicate how the amateur investigator can best assist in the development of social studies.

Each chapter was first written by the group member whose name appears at its head. It was then duplicated and sent to all the other group members, so that it could be criticized and discussed at the next meeting of the group.[1] Indeed, the bulk of the contributions have been considered, revised, re-considered, and revised again, sometimes being redrafted three or four times. The criticism has been free and often drastic, but mainly constructive. Every member of the group has played a part in this discussion, and the volume is thus, in a literal sense, a co-operative product. While it would be too much to say that each statement made and each proposal put forward would receive the unqualified assent of the whole group membership, the contributions in their final form represent views concerning which a very substantial amount of agreement has been achieved. It is not infrequently said that when psychologists, anthropologists, or sociologists meet, little but disagreement emerges. This book may be regarded as a practical rebuttal of such a charge.

[1] Only in the case of Chapter IV was this procedure not adopted. For personal reasons Dr. Collins was unable to complete her contribution in time for duplication and group discussion.

An initial draft of the chapter on methods of assessing temperament was made by Dr. R. B. Cattell. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Cattell left this country to undertake work in America, and since it has been a principle of group procedure that alterations to contributions should be discussed directly between the author and the other group members, it was necessary to find another writer who could take over the task which Dr. Cattell had begun.

Any book of this kind must be highly selective. Not all methods and problems can be discussed, and only a few topics can be treated under each heading. It is therefore inevitable that the volume should appear to be somewhat discontinuous in parts and to suffer from certain striking omissions. The absence of any more than passing reference to the methods and problems of economics must not be held to imply a failure to recognize the important part played by economic factors and motives in human social behaviour. The group considered, however, that the social applications of economics had already been more widely discussed than those of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. We have also made no effort to describe fully the contributions which can be made by medicine or, indeed, any of the biological sciences other than the three chosen.

The group decided to confine its attention mainly to practical and methodological questions, and, with a few exceptions, fundamental general theories have not been mentioned or critically weighed. In particular, within the sphere of social psychology proper, we have not attempted to present or to evaluate the historical development of social theories which has taken place throughout the last 200 years, since David Hume brilliantly foresaw a " science of man " which " will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility, to any other of human comprehension ". Hence no adequate account has been given of the work of the psychologists and sociologists who have expounded social theory. It is true that the relatively specific, detailed, and controlled methods of research with which this book is mainly concerned all demand a theoretical basis and justification, and that many of them have developed as a direct result of suggestions and conclusions presented in earlier and contemporary theoretical discussion. But to have attempted a reasonably complete historical survey would have carried the book beyond all convenient limits of size.

The greater part of the editorial work involved in the production

of this volume has been done by Dr. Lindgren, who has been particularly assisted by Professor Bartlett, Dr. Thouless, and Professor Ginsberg. The index has been compiled by Dr. Pickford. Dr. Vernon has undertaken the arrangements for the group meetings and has throughout acted as general secretary. Miss Esther Vernon-Jones has been responsible for the extremely important and difficult task of typing and circulating the majority of the contributions, as well as helping to check and complete references.

The first aim which the group has set itself is achieved ; there are many others. More specialized surveys are needed, and will be attempted. It is hoped to initiate, to aid in organizing and, if the opportunity offers, to carry out research upon many of the topics considered in the present volume, and upon others as well. The group as a whole, or any member of it, will be glad to receive and consider suggestions from intending field workers, trained or untrained, or from laboratory investigators, and in every possible way to assist in directing the rapidly growing world interest in the scientific study of society.

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CHAPTER I

SOME PROBLEMS AND TOPICS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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I. INTRODUCTION

Normal man is not a solitary animal. Most aspects of his experience and behaviour challenge the intelligent social psychologist in some way. For working purposes, however, it is reasonable to mark off certain types of problem and to label them individual and social psychology respectively, though the difference between them is one of accentuation rather than of material.[1] For example, the detailed study of colour, hearing, taste, smell, and bodily appetites is usually classified as individual psychology. Yet the total experience, of which one of the above-mentioned sensations may form the focal aspect, is often of social importance. Moreover, that social importance is greater to-day than two generations ago, because of the exploitation, by advertisement and propaganda, of those aspects of life.

In the present chapter rigid selection is inevitable, but collaborators will deal with some of the many problems which are not mentioned here. Since selection usually implies criticism, it may be said that the problems which have been chosen are regarded as especially important for psychological theory or practice. To select problems in order of urgency, as judged by the writer, is tempting, but must be resisted. Thus many readers may think that the most urgent practical problem for European social psychology at the moment is the furthering of friendly relations

[1] Cf. Chapter II for a fuller consideration of this distinction.

between nations, and that it should take precedence of all others. Yet to consider this problem satisfactorily from the social psychologist's point of view would involve all the aspects of social behaviour which it is the purpose of this chapter to illustrate.

There may be psychological reasons why certain social problems of undoubted importance have not, until recently, suggested themselves to psychologists. To discover them is itself an attractive psychological task. Let us mention a few of these avoided problems.

In England the implications of social stratification are taken so much for granted that only of late have psychologists begun to study them (59). Before the Great War, the idea of the inevitability of war seems to have been challenged by few psychologists other than William James, though many had exposed the ambiguity of the doctrine that " human nature never changes ". While K. Dunlap (17), G. van N. Dearborn (15), and J. C. Flügel (18) are distinguished exceptions to the rule that psychologists, as distinct from ethnologists, seem to have shown little interest in clothing, the psychological aspects of speaking are almost untouched, except by E. Sapir (55) and C. E. Seashore (56); yet speaking and clothing are not only two outstanding signs of personality, but in most countries have striking social importance,[1] as every dramatic producer and social climber knows.

Certainly one of the most important tasks of the social psychologist is to record, study, and explain the ways in which the desires, beliefs, and actions of individuals are influenced both directly and indirectly by propaganda, especially when it makes use of the press, the cinema, radio, and television, thereby creating a further set of problems in connection with each of these instruments of dissemination (1, 14, 19, 55, 28, 39). The varied uses, for purposes of propaganda, of the Coronation in England in 1937 would be a valuable subject for investigation.

Propaganda is often profitably used to sell articles of clothing or cosmetics, which alter the appearance of people, who buy them to increase the ' power ' of their personality; this again raises social problems. The vogue for striking personalities, fed by the cinema, radio, and the illustrated papers, is of great topical interest. For example, the success of many political and administrative leaders

[1] Cf. (47), where social taboos (pp. 171–5) and the social importance of speaking (chaps. 1, 2, 12, and 19) are described.

may depend upon the public acceptance of the idea that their personality and character are in some way outstanding. It seems not unfair to say that most psychologists have hitherto neglected these problems. Furthermore, though there has been much study of propaganda since the Great War, the results have not yet seriously affected the way in which psychological text-books are written.

Some account of relevant investigations will, however, be given in this chapter, and will show that the ' social psychology of everyday life ' (12) is at last being established.

It seems justifiable to classify our problems, provisionally, according to the methods used to attack them, which may be summarized thus :

1. *Unsystematic Observation*
   (*a*) By untrained persons.
   (*b*) By trained persons.
2. *Systematic Observation*
   (*a*) With the full knowledge of the subjects.
   (*b*) With the half-knowledge of the subjects.
   (*c*) Without the knowledge of the subjects.
3. *Self-Observation*
   (*a*) Indicating likes and dislikes (e.g. by checking items on a list, with or without estimating their strength, or adding descriptive reasons).
   (*b*) Attempting to give reasons for these preferences.[1]
   (*c*) Procedures 3 (*a*) and (*b*) accompanied by attempts at self-analysis (e.g. when a radio listener records ' ambivalent ' attitudes of liking and disliking towards a ' thriller ', trashy music, a speech by a popular dignitary, or a sponsored advertisement programme).

Techniques used in all these studies are :

1. *The Interview* (cf. Chapters III, XI, XIII, and XV)
   (*a*) Genuinely casual and desultory.
   (*b*) Apparently casual, but with its form determined by the interviewer.
   (*c*) Obviously premeditated.

[1] The ' reasons ', when examined, sometimes prove to be ' rationalizations ' in the psycho-analytic sense.

2. *The Questionnaire* (cf. Chapter IX)

(*a*) Impersonally distributed and anonymously answered.
(*b*) Personally distributed and anonymously answered.
(*c*) Personally distributed and signed by the subject.
(*d*) Unobtrusively employed by the interviewer (who asks a series of set questions in an apparently casual manner and notes the answers in a special way).

3. *Tests* (cf. Chapters VII–X)

II. INVESTIGATIONS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

The widespread unemployment in many countries has exerted influences of a nature and extent which challenge psychological investigation. Any inquiry into the mental effects of continued unemployment will reveal changes in all the categories of experience and behaviour mentioned above.

A. THE MARIENTHAL INVESTIGATION [1]

A valuable and striking investigation was made on the unemployed of Marienthal, a village of 1,486 inhabitants not far from Vienna. The whole village had been unemployed for some three years, and the effects of unemployment were studied by a variety of methods (34). A team of investigators was sent out by the Industrial Research Institute of the Department of Psychology at Vienna University, and the inhabitants were approached through various agencies specially established by the investigators. Thus clothes were collected in Vienna and distributed in Marienthal; needlework and gymnastic classes were run; free medical and vocational advice were given (cf. Chapter XVI). In these ways it was possible to gather very detailed information about almost all the families in the village.

Many of the results of the study are of great importance and need to be followed up in other areas. Here we can merely give a brief indication of some of them.

Because of the extremely restricted bi-weekly income (dole), most housewives had detailed and rigid budgets; yet characteristically

[1] This section was written by Dr. Oeser.

irrational expenditure often occurred. Thus children got large meals on pay-day and starved later; a woman suddenly bought a pair of curling tongs instead of food; allotments were planted entirely with flowers. Nevertheless wants and interests had shrunk to a striking extent. Even the Christmas wishes of children were very modest ones, frequently expressed in the subjunctive: " If I *could* wish, I *would* like . . . " All conflicts were played out on the lower plane of individual quarrelsomeness, and debating and political clubs and institutions disappeared. Time lost its characteristic fixed points of reference, so that unpunctuality was the rule, even for meals. Of 100 men, 88 carried no watch. Very few newspapers and books were read. There was a far-reaching absence of any form of planning.

As was to be expected, the low income brought with it a great deterioration of health and of resistance to disease. The paralysing effect of unemployment was measured by classifying all families, according to a number of observational criteria, into those who were still unbroken and resistant to social degeneration, even if in despair; those who were resigned; and those who were broken, apathetic, no longer looked after their children or kept up appearances. The figures were: unbroken, 23 per cent; resigned, 69 per cent; broken, 8 per cent. It was clear that the last group would steadily grow as time went on.

B. INVESTIGATIONS AT GREENWICH AND DUNDEE

Before the Marienthal investigation, unemployment had never been studied so intensively or extensively by psychologists. However, an American investigator, E. W. Bakke, describes the mental attitudes of unemployed in Greenwich (6), and research by a team carried out in Dundee under the direction of O. A. Oeser is reported in Chapter XVI of the present book.

Of psychological interest and importance, too, is the work of H. L. Beales and R. S. Lambert, who arranged B.B.C. broadcasts on unemployment (7).

III. ATTITUDES

In America attention has recently been focussed upon ' attitudes ' and attempts to measure them. Probably the most illuminating

contributions to this subject have been written by G. W. Allport, Hadley Cantril, and W. McDougall (38), the last-named having discussed the difficult question of the relation of attitudes to the affective life. The following section owes much to Allport's chapter on "Attitudes" in C. Murchison's *Handbook of Social Psychology* (42).

The relatively new concept of attitude is described by him as "probably the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary American social psychology" (p. 798). Social psychology is even defined by some writers as the scientific study of attitudes. Attitude has come to signify many things; perhaps too many, for it may obscure highly significant differences between varieties of opinion and belief, and between the abstract qualities of character, as well as between sentiments and complexes.

Cantril proposes the following definition: "a more or less enduring state of readiness of mental organization which predisposes an individual to react in a characteristic way to any object or situation with which it is related."[1] General attitudes and quite specific attitudes certainly exist. Public and private, common and individual attitudes have also been distinguished, though in this field, as in the related field of sentiments, the wisdom of applying these adjectives to the attitudes or sentiments, rather than to the objects towards which they are directed, may be doubted.

Many attempts have been and are being made to 'measure' attitudes,[2] and in the next few pages only a few of these can be mentioned.

The simplest method for determining the prevalence of a given attitude (really, in this case, an *opinion*) in a certain community is by tabulating the answers to a questionnaire. This measures the range and distribution, but not the intensity, of individual or general opinion. The use of such a method is illustrated by a poll concerning pacifistic and militaristic attitudes, which was taken amongst 22,627 students in 70 American colleges; 39 per cent declared that they would participate in no war whatsoever, 33 per cent would take part only if the United States were invaded, and 28 per cent were ready to fight for any cause that might lead the nation to declare

[1] Cf. Chapter V, Section V.

[2] Cf. Allport, "Attitudes" (42), and Chapter IX, which discusses several related questions.

war. The objection that such a result expresses only 'verbal opinion', or a temporary attitude which might change under the pressure of propaganda or other influences, applies to many existing methods for determining the strength and nature of personal attitudes.

From a study of religious attitudes, Daniel Katz and F. H. Allport (29) concluded that students who feel maladjusted in respect of their religious faith tend to be those who are also worried and unsettled concerning their own personalities, i.e. that disorganization in one set of attitudes is likely to be accompanied by disorganization in another.

The use by E. S. Bogardus of the 'Social Distance' Scale (10) is well known. The subject is asked, for example, to indicate the degree of intimacy which he would willingly sanction between himself and members of various races. However, the distance between each of these degrees of intimacy is not necessarily comparable. Each higher degree of intimacy ought to imply all those that are lower; yet, in some instances, admission of a foreigner to neighbourly relations may be less distasteful than admitting him to one's occupation. The scale showed that the attitudes of Americans are most favourable towards Canadians, the English, and the Scots, less favourable to the Chinese, and least favourable to the Turks. But few of the subjects studied by means of the scale had ever known, or even seen, a Turk; history text-books and war atrocity stories explain this ready-made attitude. G. H. Green's investigation of the attitude of Welsh children towards the Chinese is also of interest here (23).

G. W. Allport considers that recent success in the measuring of attitudes is a major accomplishment of American social psychology; nevertheless he indicates its limitations[1]:—

(1) Measurement can deal only with common attitudes, and relatively few attitudes are common enough to be profitably scaled. By forcing attitudes into a scale, violence is done to the unique structure of man's mind.

(2) Each person possesses many contradictory attitudes. For this reason his reaction when he is filling up a form may not be persistent.

(3) Rationalization and deception inevitably occur, especially when the attitude studied pertains to the subject's moral life or

[1] Cf. Chapter IX.

social status. The difficulty of obtaining reliable information concerning attitudes towards sex is a case in point. Here anonymity is no guarantee. Lack of insight, ignorance, suspicion, fear, a neurotic sense of guilt, undue enthusiasm, or even a knowledge of the investigator's purpose, may invalidate an inquiry.

Since people are influenced greatly by both majority and expert opinion on social and political issues, the use of propaganda in establishing attitudes is important.[1] But in any case the inescapable fact remains that the process of signalizing the opinion which is supposed to characterize the attitude 'measured' is a special, rather unusual form of behaviour, involving a prescribed use of writing materials, towards a special type of imagined situation. Moreover, as is usual in this type of work, interest is seldom taken in the obviously psychological problem: what goes on in the individual's mind when an 'attitude' is aroused? Many who treated psycho-neurotic soldiers during the Great War will remember that some unusual and violently expressed attitudes towards the inhabitants of different countries, the Church, the Army, etc., were accompanied (and perhaps caused) by unusually vivid imagery, sometimes of a pseudo-hallucinatory or 'eidetic' character, illustrating some emotional episode. Other less unusual attitudes might have been 'carried by' words, and the difference between these types of attitude may be very significant. The genesis of individual attitudes is still a neglected field of investigation, except in the realm of sex, where the psycho-analysts have developed their characteristic approach.

An investigation which aimed at illuminating the mental processes underlying what some psychologists might term an 'attitude' was carried out by R. H. Thouless, who examined the tendency to certainty in religious belief (58). Subjects were asked to indicate the degree of certainty with which they assented to or dissented from a series of statements. Some of these were of a religious and some of a non-religious character. The object of the investigation was to discover how far empirical evidence could be obtained for the existence of a tendency, when accepting or rejecting religious propositions, to prefer high degrees of certainty.

The evidence provided strong confirmation of the view that there was such a tendency. This tendency was also found even in responses

[1] See Section V, A, below.