Experimental Social Psychology

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EXPERIMENTAL
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

To

May Hartley Barclay

and

Wade Crawford Barclay

Les distinctions que je viens de proposer sont entièrement théoriques . . . leur but est de préparer les voies à des recherches expérimentales; l'expérimentation seule peut éclairer ces différents points . . . il faudra rechercher ensuite si l'expérience confirme les distinctions susdites.

Alfred Binet (*La suggestibilité*, pp. 6-7)

. . . die Natur eine zahlenmässig präzise Antwort erteilt, wenn man ihr eine präzise Frage stellt. Nicht eine mangelnde Gesetzmässigkeit teleologischer Bezüge im Menschen, sondern mangelnde Präzision der Fragestellung hat der interpretativen Methode der Geisteswissenschaften bisher das quantitative Resultat im allgemeinen versagt.

Charlotte Bühler (*Kindheit und Jugend*, p. 193)

All of the social sciences have a common aim—the understanding of human behavior; a common method—the quantitative analysis of behavior records; and a common aspiration—to devise ways of experimenting upon behavior.

Wesley C. Mitchell ("Quantitative Analysis in Economic Theory," *American Economic Review*, 1925, Vol. 15, p. 6).

FOREWORD

The effort to make social psychology an experimental science has long been under way. That much has been done in this direction we trust these pages will make clear. That the data secured by experimental methods have not as yet given us a "systematized" science will be equally clear. The venture to understand the social behavior of human beings is of such overwhelming importance that we believe there is now a place for a volume which has no purpose but to show what the experimental approach to such problems has yielded and what it may rightfully be expected to yield. It is not suggested that this is the only effort which should occupy the social psychologist; rather, that it is one task among many with which he is concerned.

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G. M.
L. B. M.

Morningside Heights
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PART ONE

Basic Principles

EXPERIMENTAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY: SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AMONG THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Experimental method in social psychology is not new. The closing years of the nineteenth century saw the appearance of a number of experimental studies of competition and suggestion; and the years from 1900 to the outbreak of the War offered a steadily increasing quantity of experimental studies of social behavior in children and in adults. In 1914 Moede[1] and in 1920 Allport[2] defined a social psychology which should have the same solid experimental foundations as had already been achieved for general psychology. After the War the number of experimental studies began to increase at a disturbingly rapid pace; bibliographies began to be sprinkled with titles suggesting that problems previously tabooed from the laboratory were actually demanding the attention of experimentalists, or laying claim to attention comparable to that given to such established fields as psychophysics, reaction-time, learning, and association.

The pioneer investigations of F. H. Allport[3] and H. T. Moore[4] upon the phenomena of "social facilitation" and of suggestibility in response to "majority opinion" have served as inspiration for many studies of the influence of the group upon this or that mental process. The measurement of social traits, stimulated in large part by the success of intelligence tests, has been the subject of a bewildering mass of investigations. Psychological problems suggested by sociology, such as public opinion, propaganda, and the psychology of political campaigns and elections, have drawn heavily upon psychological method. But perhaps the most striking of all the experimental developments has been the rapid increase in the quantity and the quality of research upon the

social development of children. The decade from 1910 to 1920 witnessed the beginnings of systematic experimental work on the psychology of newborn infants; and the decade 1920-30 has presented an astonishing array of investigations upon the instinctive and emotional make-up of children, the ways in which they learn and the processes by which they become socialized. It is in fact apparent that experimental child psychology offers a wealth of new material to a scientific social psychology.

Two kinds of social psychology

All these new research methods are remaking social psychology at a pace which bewilders the careful student. For even the most carefully constructed systems of social psychology are not, despite their thoughtfulness and ingenuity, elastic enough to adapt themselves to the overwhelming quantity of data now pouring in. There are, curiously enough, two kinds of social psychology which hardly know each other by sight—the systematic social psychology of the scholar, and the experimental social psychology of the laboratory worker. The latter, though its students have now piled high a thousand pieces of research, lacks spokesmen who might try to give it an articulate presentation. Instead of a "defense" of experimental method in social psychology, there is need for a volume suggesting what it is and what it may hope to become. We have ventured to write such a book, and the rapidity with which our present material will be rendered out of date will, we are sure, bear testimony in itself to the need that such a study, no matter how serious its shortcomings, shall be presented without further delay.

Early social psychology

The history of systematic study of man's social behavior belongs, strangely enough, to the history of economics, ethics, jurisprudence, and other disciplines which have not been primarily concerned with first-hand investigation of human nature. These social sciences may make psychological assumptions, but their methods and even their results often have to do with complex data not reduced to the kind of conceptual schema which a psy-

chologist inevitably uses. Social psychology, in so far as it existed at all among the Greeks, or the Schoolmen, or the English social philosophers of the eighteenth century, was the property of the historian, the moralist, the political theorist. Not indeed that systematic psychology was lacking. On the contrary, at no time between 600 B.C. and the present has the world lacked its scholarly psychologists, and only for a short period in the darkest part of the "Dark Ages" was there any dearth of original systematic thinking in psychology. How then may we account for the consistent unconcern which psychologists have manifested toward social behavior, the conspiracy of silence through which they eloquently contend that psychology is the science of the detached individual mind?

It may be objected that some of the greatest of philosophers have been both psychologists and political theorists, or psychologists and moralists, and so on. The point, if closely scrutinized, brings out the force of our contention more clearly, for actually these men are indeed psychologists *and* social scientists, but while they are one they are not the other. The Aristotle, for example, who wrote the *De Anima* is the Aristotle of the *Politics* only in a biographical sense; even if one sees fit to emphasize Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as a background for his other books, one is at a loss to see just what Aristotle's teachings on sensation, will and reason have to do with the psychology of politics or even with psychological assumptions underlying Aristotle's ethical theory. An extreme instance of this appears in the case of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in which a list of human motives is given. Motives appear in the *Rhetoric* because the orator needs to know about them; they have scarcely been mentioned in the *De Anima*. The *Rhetoric* is, if you like, a book on social psychology, but a book which no Greek and no Schoolman thought of as such. It cannot, as a matter of fact, be shown to have influenced modern psychology except through the fact that Thomas Hobbes—a contributor at the same time to the social sciences and to psychology—knew Aristotle well, and in Aristotelian

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language described the make-up of human beings in such a way as to permit of a theory of their interaction with one another. He was reviled by some, ignored by others; and though, more than a century later, a similar conception of the interrelation between psychology and social science was utilized by political economists and criminologists, some of whom paid tribute to Hobbes, the fact remains that they failed to elaborate his psychology. Not only did they fail to see the crudities of his psychological system, but they saw no necessity for finding out more psychological facts.

The precursors of social psychology

It must be remembered that thousands of able men in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were thinking about the laws of social behavior, and that whether they called themselves political economists, moralists, jurists, or what not, they all with one accord made it plain that they considered the important thing to be the *social interaction* of men; the nature of the individual man was left, as a rather irrelevant problem, to a very different person—the psychologist!

Nor did the psychologist seem to object to this division of labor. Psychology dealt with the nature of the individual mind. Whether rooted in metaphysical, biological, or mechanical assumptions, its task remained the description of individual experience and behavior. The great problems of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century psychology had to do with the relation between mind and body, and with the nature of perception, association, and memory. Moreover, the experimental psychology of the nineteenth century began with investigations of perception, and during the middle of the century was still almost exclusively concerned with cognitive processes. In these studies it seldom occurred to the investigator to consider the influence of the social experience of his subject or even the social influence exerted by the experimenter or other persons in contact with the subject.

By the middle of the century, however, social theorists, notably the Utilitarians, had created a demand for the discussion of the influence of individuals upon one another; and something like a

systematic social psychology gradually formed itself, first in vague, then in more definite, outlines. In his two great books, written just after the middle of the century, Bain[5] makes a serious attempt to show the interactions between the individual make-up and such social patterns as are emphasized by the student of ethics and æsthetics. In 1860, Steinthal and Lazarus founded a journal for folk psychology,[6] which, though not concerned with "social psychology" in the sense here used, but with the supposed "group minds" of various peoples, formulated problems which social psychology later began to study. Spencer,[7] Darwin,[8] Bagehot,[9] and many others also began to show interrelations between biological and psychological concepts, on the one hand, and the concepts of social science, on the other.

The study of suggestion was the beginning of experimental social psychology

The actual beginning of *experimental social psychology* seems to have been the experimental study of suggestion, first put on a scientific basis by Braid[10] between 1841 and 1860, extended and systematized by the Nancy School (especially Bernheim[11]) and demonstrated by Binet and Féré[12] to be an integral part of experimental psychology. Experimental social psychology did not arise directly from experimental physiology or experimental psychology; with the exception of Binet and Féré, outstanding psychologists gave no serious attention to the problem; it is not clear that even these men who founded the new science realized that they were doing anything more than exploring a problem in individual psychology. Since the responses of individual organisms are invariably the subject matter of psychology, it was not at first evident that any particular importance was to be attached to the fact that the stimulus was a person, and that the interaction of persons—in other words, social psychology—was involved.

Immense importance was, however, assigned to imitation and suggestion by Tarde,[13] Le Bon[14] and others in the closing decade of the century; it is generally agreed that modern social psychology was founded by these men and their followers. The concepts exploited by Le Bon and other students of the crowd are evidently derived in large part from reports of hysteria and other

morbid phenomena in clinic or hospital, while Tarde's dependence upon studies of suggestion (especially those of Bernheim) is even more striking. The work of these great systematic social psychologists is not indeed experimental. Curiously enough, experimental social psychology had been in existence for a generation before the recognition that a province of social psychology existed, and the writers of the 'nineties used both clinical and laboratory findings of other men in the construction of their new science, without adding new researches of their own.

The battle over instincts

Just as suggestion and imitation were the concepts most frequently invoked by social psychologists in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, so the era inaugurated by the publication of William McDougall's *Introduction to Social Psychology* in 1908 was dominated by the concept of instinct. McDougall, to be sure, utilized the concepts of suggestion and imitation; in fact, his own theory of suggestion has been widely influential. For McDougall, however, the interaction of individuals was to be understood primarily in terms of the mainsprings to action—in other words, motives; and these motives were reduced to a very limited number of specific instincts (curiosity, flight, pugnacity, etc.), with which were associated certain specific emotions. Lists of human motives are at least as old as Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, but there is no instance in history in which the passion for listing or making inventories of human motives enjoyed such popularity as in the decade which followed McDougall's book. Thorndike's *Original Nature of Man* (1913) and Woodworth's *Dynamic Psychology* (1918) are typical expressions of the interest of psychologists in the matter of cataloguing instincts; while in the same era sociologists, economists and educators turned such lists to account or made up new lists of their own. Veblen's *Instinct of Workmanship* (1914) and Trotter's *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (1916) are typical.

Based as it was on schematization rather than on experimental evidence, the doctrine of complex innate action-patterns was bound to have its day. The anti-instinct movement of 1919 and the years immediately following seems to have begun with Dunlap's contention that adult action-patterns admit of no dissection into elementary instinctive components.[15] The word instinct seems to be going out of use as a result of the success of the anti-instinct writers. In the meantime, of course, urges, impulses, and especially drives have come into fashion, and it is customary to assume that these urges or drives are vastly less complex than were the instincts posited by naturalists like Fabre and psychologists like McDougall. The evidence on this complicated point will be discussed in Chapter II, but no one can seriously pretend that the instinct problem has been settled, or even that there is any *one* simple and straightforward "instinct problem." The last five years have witnessed a decline of interest in polemics on the subject.

It remains tragically true that much of the thinking that has been done in social psychology since 1908 has been devoted to preparation for, participation in, and recovery from a war (largely a war of words) as to the innate predispositions out of which man's social life is, or is supposed to be, derived. There seems at present to be a lull, and a bewilderment, as after other such conflicts, as to "what good came of it at last." Nevertheless, a very great deal of good came from the new emphasis upon the dynamic aspects of both individual and social psychology.

The historical or cultural interpretation of behavior

In this very epoch, the anthropologists have been working out their own social-psychological hypotheses, attempting to define the nature of "culture" and its transmission, with relatively little dependence upon assumptions as to the original nature of man. Psychologists have in the last few years begun to study closely such anthropological contributions. The decline of the instinct doctrine made the cultural or historical interpretation of complex action-patterns more easily admissible, and several writers on social psychology who have approached the field from psychology

rather than from sociology have taken over this concept of a highly plastic human nature shaped almost entirely by the culture which acts upon it, and have put this view forward as their own form of anti-instinct psychology. They grant, of course, that the only way that culture can shape individuals who are born into a given community is by modifying their original nature, or, if you like, by permitting it to develop in certain ways and not in others. In order to say anything really profound about the laws governing the transmission of culture, one would have to understand the learning process—something which we scarcely understand at all at present. It is, however, reasonable to suppose that as we do penetrate more and more into the nature of learning, so as to tell exactly what we mean by those forms of learning which we now call suggestion, imitation, indoctrination, and the like, we shall be able to use this anthropological material to greater and greater advantage.

The data of social psychology are usually relative to the culture in which they are found

But though the concept of culture cannot be said to have solved any of our psychological problems, it has awakened us to an immensely important fact regarding the limits of what we are pleased to call social psychology. It must be recognized that nearly all the experimental work in social psychology, such as makes up the subject matter of this book, has value and is definitely meaningful only in relation to the particular culture in which the investigation was carried on.[16] Such psychological laws as we can discover are for the most part statements of relations discoverable between stimuli and responses in civilized man, and perhaps many of them hold good only in specific groups or under specific social conditions.[17] The social psychologist is, of course, not content with such generalizations as these; he wishes to find laws which are universal for the entire human family and for all existing or historically known cultures. It may reasonably be conjectured that a few of the laws already discovered —for example, some of the laws relating to suggestion and social facilitation—hold good among oriental as well as among occi-

dental peoples, and among primitive peoples as well as among those more advanced. But it would be going outside the domain of experimental social psychology to insist even upon such a cautious statement as this. Whether any of our laws are really fundamental and necessary laws, deriving inevitably from human nature wherever it exists, can only be determined by experiment itself. Even the psychologist who has acquainted himself with but a few careful ethnological records will, we believe, have felt the massive significance of the historical approach. No matter how earnestly he may cling to biological conceptions, he will find himself perforce thinking of the individual man no longer as the biologically self-sufficient unit but as a bundle of attitudes and habits which are a part of a historical process.

The need for interpretative social psychology

It is not the purpose of this book to deal with the detailed history of systematic social psychology. But we wish to emphasize the many useful functions which such systematic work has served, both in broadening the psychologist's conception of his science and in enabling social scientists to see more and more psychological implications in their work. It is our conviction that there is place and need for systematic social psychology, and that the need becomes even greater as the volume of empirical data increases. There is in fact need for two distinct forms of "systematic" social psychology: one, the synthesis of thousands of observational data of a kind accessible without the use of experimental and statistical method; the other, the philosophical interpretation of fundamental trends and meanings. With neither of these two types of systematic social psychology has the present work any close affiliation. Its business is grubby, mole-like; it digs here and there in a thousand interesting places accessible by means of its own instruments; it aims at the faithful presentation and interpretation of specific methods and discoveries characteristic of the experimental and quantitative social psychology

The limitations of this book

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