

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POLITICAL DOMINATION

by

CARL MURCHISON, Ph.D.

*Professor of Psychology and Director of the
Psychological Laboratories in Clark University*

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Edited by

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PREFACE

For some years I have felt that the field of social psychology was not only in a condition of chaotic discussion, but that it was also almost entirely untouched by the masses of data gathered by educational psychologists, mental testers, and others primarily interested in the problems of measurement and analysis of distributions. This book is an attempt to give expression to that idea.

Political domination is so obvious a phenomenon in every walk of daily life and on every page of history that it must have a biological and psychological basis. Social institutions and particular forms of social behavior are but trivial and incidental consequences brought about by the ever present and irresistible influence of those persons or communities that dominate others.

This book is not intended to be used as an elementary textbook, though it may be so used by those who like to play with ideas and who are not forced by mental or economic restrictions to lead the life of formal quiz-masters.

The field of social psychology will cease to exist even by the end of this generation unless its subject-matter can consist of more important things than hypotheses concerning natural behavior or of mere verbal definitions. If the psychologist is unable to keep possession of this field, it will rapidly become occupied by the historian, the sociologist, the economist, and the educationalist. In accordance with the principles of

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this book, the field of social psychology will eventually be occupied by those most competent to survive under the conditions of that subject-matter. It is my hope that these more competent individuals will be psychologists, though there is no guarantee that such will be the case. Psychology in this field is poverty-stricken and has escaped a death notice chiefly because no one has called in the coroner. This need not continue to be the case.

In the field of social psychology, as in psychology in general, we need ideas more than we need anything else. There are hundreds of men who are either brilliantly equipped or fairly well equipped to do experimental work if they only knew what to work at. The greatest comedian in science is that person who periodically breaks out in print or speech to the effect that experimental work is all-important and that the discussion of ideas and of theories is largely of secondary importance. The individual whose professional life is built up on that kind of philosophy is merely deceiving himself in the most difficult way possible, when some simple way would be just as effective.

CARL MURCHISON

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PART I
Introductory

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY?

It will be the thesis of this book that social psychology deals with those human characteristics that make political life inevitable.

It is unlikely that political life is the result of a possession of similar characteristics on the part of individuals. It seems more reasonable to assume that political life is the result of differences and conflicts. The mere existence of laws on statute books and the organized attempt to enforce such laws imply distinctly different forms of reaction to goods, chattels, economic values, credits, etc., on the part of individuals in the community. Quite likely this has come about because of differences in the ability or the opportunity to learn. Social psychologists in the past have been more concerned in enumerating and describing the characteristics or forms of behavior held in common by human beings, and have attempted to show that these common factors are causative in social life. This method of analysis, however, emphasizes characteristics that are not fully obvious, and passes over lightly the most characteristic things in social life. If there are social instincts and such instincts are markedly similar in human beings, it is difficult to see how laws could either originate or be enforced. That is, under such simple conditions political life never would have achieved such great importance, and human social life would be no more complex than is the social life of birds or fish. But a

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distribution of mental and physical characteristics of such nature that some individuals possess markedly more of some capacities than others will guarantee the ultimate development of political institutions and behavior. It is not necessary to assume that behavior forms that are highly efficient in one period of national development will be equally efficient throughout successive periods of national life. It is quite likely that an individual most markedly endowed for successful behavior in one period of national history may be least markedly endowed for successful behavior in some other period. No amount of searching for common behavior characteristics can succeed in furnishing a basis for the explanation of such phenomena.

About two years ago the author became interested in the promotion of a series of lectures in Clark University which were later published under the title *Psychologies of 1925*. It is the prevailing fashion to assume that there is a common subject-matter in psychology and that theoretical differences are not of primary importance. The fundamental differences in actual subject-matter used by the various authors in the above lectures came as a kind of shock to most readers. Is it true that the various schools of psychology are dealing with a common subject-matter?

Let us assume a structuralist and a behaviorist to be interested in the problem of emotion. Of course, this assumption is an invalid one, since we are using the word emotion to mean two wholly different things. But ignoring that fact for the moment, let us consider the subject-matter used by these two psychologists while investigating what we assume to be a common

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problem. The behaviorist is interested in the situation and is careful to describe what the conditions of the experiment are. The structuralist is equally interested in the situation and is equally careful to describe the conditions, but only so far does any similarity exist. The similarity exists up to this point merely because nothing psychological has yet happened. As soon as the experiment begins, the behaviorist becomes interested entirely in what he observes the subject to be doing. The structuralist, on the other hand, after recording in a painstaking manner what the subject has to say about his experiences, reconstructs from such raw material a more accurate statement of what the subject really experiences. The raw material with which the behaviorist has worked is in no way similar to the data gathered by the structuralist. Even if he wished, neither one could make any use of the data gathered by the other. It is of no importance at all that each one admits that there is a legitimate field for the other and that their data represent concomitant processes. Such admissions are merely friendly concessions based on pure inference. Such being the case, how can the two psychologists above be investigating an identical problem? They have merely used the same word as a name for the problem they are interested in. But one is interested entirely in the subjective play of form and structure, while the other is interested entirely in observable physiological and behavior changes in another organism. The two problems are not the same, and nothing is gained by pretending that they are.

No causative relation being known well enough to

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be understood, it would seem to be better science not to assume that the configurations and structures of consciousness are in some way a common subject-matter with muscular contractions of various types. If it is so difficult to determine a common field for the various schools of psychology, how much more difficult must it be to determine the field of social psychology.

When the average student uses the term "social psychology," he usually intends the term to mean such things as gathering in crowds, fighting, loving, etc., and imagines these things to be determined by some mysterious force or instinct. Such things, however, are exceedingly trivial portions of the subject-matter of social psychology, and in no way deserve the large portions of space they have received in current textbooks. Fighting, for example, probably plays a much less significant rôle in social behavior than does the reading of newspapers. Yet the type of behavior involved in the reading of newspapers would scarcely be mentioned in a textbook on social psychology which would give an entire chapter to the problem of fighting.

There are many measurable characteristics which make fighting inevitable. These characteristics are of such an order that they occur in markedly different degrees in various individuals. The ability to acquire, either in the form usually classified as learning or in the form involving the acquisition of wealth, is a characteristic which will largely determine whether the community will be peaceful or pugnacious. It is of more value that such characteristics, together with their varying degree of occurrence, be investigated

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than that so much importance be given to the superficial after-effects which are usually classified as the subject-matter of social psychology.

When we speak of the characteristics that make political life inevitable, we mean behavior characteristics. We are not dealing with economic or geographical influences, but primarily with behavior forms. The behavior forms that determine political life are not necessarily merely the behavior of some individual. Neither is it useful to consider that they are the behavior of groups. Both Allport's concept of social psychology as dealing with the social behavior of the individual and McDougall's concept of social psychology as dealing with the structure and behavior of group minds have proved almost entirely barren as working hypotheses.

I well remember the acclaim with which psychology in general welcomed the publication of McDougall's *Introduction to Social Psychology*. Here at last seemed to be something really psychological, something that could be applied in the interpretation of the behavior of groups. Of course, it was assumed generally that the human race occurs in natural, well-differentiated divisions or groups varying in size from two to many millions. When McDougall's *Group Mind* appeared, years later, the acclaim was just as enthusiastic on the part of many psychologists, but a doubtful uncertainty was evident in some quarters. The idea was already gaining ground that the concept of instinct was altogether too superficial for long-continued scientific usage. A critical controversy by Dunlap, Kuo, and Tolman was giving expression to this

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attitude of uncertainty. It is not necessary that the old arguments be repeated. The effect has been, however, that psychologists in general do not use the word "instinct" with the old confidence, and the conviction has become widespread that social behavior is far too complex to be analyzed adequately in terms of group characteristics.

A very few years ago when Allport's *Social Psychology* made its appearance, a sigh of relief and satisfaction was quite audible in the various quarters where instinct and group concepts were losing caste. Many thought, and openly said, that here at last was just what they had been striving to say for some time, and that it was obviously true that the subject-matter of social psychology must consist of the social behavior of the individual. But the few years since have been marked by a growing loss of enthusiasm for the idea and a marked absence of any practical value to be found in the idea. It is a well-known fact of human nature to proceed from one extreme to the other, when both may be false. Of course, there is no social behavior of the individual which in itself is of any consequence. It is only when there is marked variation in behavior on the part of one or a few powerful individuals, or on the part of many individuals whose combined strength is important, that the behavior itself becomes of any consequence. The degree of consequence can never be determined by observing alone the behavior which has varied, but only through comparison with the main body of community behavior. A simple example will make our point clear. To know that a certain individual has made a score of 185 in one of the forms of the

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Army Alpha Test would be to know nothing whatever of value concerning that individual. It is only by knowing the relative ranking of his grade among the grades made by many others that his grade achieves significance. The same is true of social behavior. To know that a certain individual reacts to a certain situation in a certain way, is to know nothing of value concerning that individual. It is only as his behavior deviates from the behavior of many others that it achieves significance. It is this which furnishes the basis of conflict and ultimately makes political life inevitable.

We will only briefly raise here the question of the objective existence of groups. It is our conviction that this notion is one of the greatest illusions of social science. There is nothing more real, however, than political life. It possesses as much objectivity as any part of the world can possess, and at the same time embraces, without exception, every phase of human experience or behavior. There are no concepts of forms of habit, no actions or relations of one individual to another, which do not enter into and become an essential part of the political life of the community.