

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The Natural History of Human Nature

BY

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TO BOBBY

PREFACE

This text is a natural history of human nature in the lives of individuals. It contains a discussion of the processes by which the newborn, who does not have human nature, develops into an adult with the characteristics regarded as essentially human. It is designed to reveal how the individual and his social heritage become two aspects of a total situation, so inextricably related that the individual can never be returned to the biologist as a mere potential human, nor can experienced aspects of the social heritage be taken from the individual. All of this takes place through the interaction of undefined organic and social processes which are brought together through the activities of the senses. These processes are called undefined because at the outset they do not belong to the individual in a functional sense. Both the organic and social processes have to be defined through experience. Once these processes are available in a functional sense, the development of human nature is continued through the interaction of organic and social processes that have been defined.

A textbook in social psychology for undergraduates fulfills its functions when it reveals the nature of human nature and the processes by which it is produced and modified. For the advanced student who has this background as a frame of reference, there is a place in social psychology for research—for the measurement of attitudes and similar projects. Undergraduates who will be teachers, lawyers, ministers, physicians, business men, social workers, and parents need to understand the nature of human nature and the processes by which it is developed.

This text on the natural history of human nature has been written in part around student experiences just as the course out of which the book has come was given in terms of student adjustments. This method was adopted so that students might think about human nature with their own background of activities as a revealing frame of reference. This procedure turned the classroom and the informal clinic connected with the course into a laboratory where students and teacher were studying human nature. The method is probably as deductive as it is inductive. The two techniques are not antagonistic but complementary. A person approaches any project with a usable mental content; he has to have ideas and theories in order to be interested.

Human nature is an integrated whole. This will account for a certain amount of repetition in the book. Aspects of human nature have been

isolated for discussion but they form an interrelated configuration in which they all develop contemporaneously in a life organization.

There is no way to determine just how many people have influenced the thinking of the author on the subject of human nature. Every social contact has doubtless been fruitful. The author feels indebted first of all to Dr. Ellsworth Faris, who introduced him to the field of social psychology. Other teachers and associates have given similar help. Students have made a notable contribution with written descriptions of their own adjustments. Without their cooperation this text would not have been possible.

LAWRENCE GUY BROWN.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI,
September, 1934.

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PART I

FRAME OF REFERENCE

CHAPTER I

THE FIELD OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Since everyone does his thinking, consciously or unconsciously, in relation to some frame of reference, it is considered good pedagogical procedure to present at the outset a critical discussion of the phenomena valuable for the study of human nature in social psychology. Thus each student will approach the study of human nature in the subsequent pages with a usable mental content, a frame of reference, a proper orientation for understanding human nature and the processes by which it develops.

As a part of this frame of reference it seems wise to describe the field of social psychology and differentiate it from psychology and sociology, with which it is interrelated, thus revealing it as a realm of study quite distinct from the particular domains of these other disciplines. The point of reference in sociology is the *group*; in psychology, it is the *individual*; and in social psychology, it is the *person*.¹ The acceptance of these points of reference gives each discipline a distinct field but does not mean that the psychologist or the sociologist cannot be a social psychologist. These three fields are closely related and depend on each other for data. No one discipline has much meaning apart from the other two.

Sociology studies the interaction of the past experiences of groups through the social processes of competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation and seeks to describe and explain these processes as well as the social structure that has resulted from this interaction. *Psychology* is concerned with physiological structures and their capacities and with the nature and function of organic processes. *Social psychology* is a study of the interaction between the organic and social processes which results in human nature. The social psychologist accepts the description of the organic and social processes as furnished by psychology

¹ The distinction between the individual and the person will come out later in the discussion in this chapter. The concepts of the person and the individual will be used in two ways in this book. In their connotative meaning they merely refer to any human being. This is the general usage. Their denotative meaning will be explained and when used in this sense will be italicized.

and sociology and proceeds to study their interaction so that he may be able to explain and describe human nature and the process by which it develops.

There can be a discipline of *psychology* in which certain laws can be formulated since "the original, hereditary equipment of each biologically normal individual is essentially like that of every other of the same species. Each inherits the same physical structure, the same characters and combinations of characters. Each generation is like each preceding one. Among human beings no new traits have been added and none has been lost in a period of perhaps twenty thousand years. The individual variation occurs within rather narrow limits and arises in consequence of the fact that each character in inheritance is determined by the combined influence of many elements, each of which is itself a variable."¹ This original equipment plays the same rôle everywhere in the development of human nature and is everywhere modified in the same way. "The original nature of the French, English, Americans, Chinese, Eskimos, Germans, and all other peoples is, in all essential respects, the same."² Therefore, it is possible to formulate universal laws in psychology concerning the organic processes, capacities, and potentialities and their rôles in the development of human nature.

There can be a discipline of *sociology* in which certain laws can be formulated because there is everywhere in human society a social heritage with folkways, mores, and institutions. Throughout the human world the same social processes are in operation, and in all climes the past experiences of groups are in interaction with each other, manifesting this relationship in competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. This being true, laws can be made that will be applicable throughout human society where groups are in interaction with each other.

There can be a discipline of *social psychology* in which laws regarding human nature can be formulated because everywhere human nature is the same in the sense that it contains the same units and comes into existence through exactly the same processes, that is, through the interaction of the organic and social processes. Laws can be hypothecated even though the contents of the units of human nature are different everywhere. For example, language differs but everywhere it is the product of the interaction between undefined organic vocalizations and the social processes of an articulate language. There are variations because the specific content of the social heritage in different cultures is not the same, but the important thing is that the processes are everywhere the same. Although the content of the units of human nature and the content of the elements of culture are not the same, they came into functional existence

¹ E. B. REUTER and C. W. HART, *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 30, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1933.

² REUTER and HART, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

in the same way. Since human nature is produced everywhere by exactly the same processes, it is possible to generalize about human nature. However, the purpose of this text is not to formulate laws but to describe the process by which human nature is developed.

Social psychology, then, is a study of the processes of interaction between the biological and social processes by which human nature is developed. It is a study of the process by which the individual and society become two aspects of a unified whole, in which human nature is the product when viewed from the standpoint of the individual. An example of the interaction of the biological and social processes is seen in emotions. Inherent in the biological being are the capacities and processes for the development of emotional behavior, which are active but undefined. Through interaction in environmental experiences emotional processes are defined as fear, love, rage, hate, etc., all attributes of the person.

The task of social psychology is to try to discover how habits, attitudes, desires, and all other phases of human nature come into existence through the interaction between the organic and social processes. Very soon after birth the organic processes are not random but have social definition as they function in the development of human nature. They no longer come into the interactive process as undefined potentialities but as they have been defined and redefined in a particular adjustment direction. Instead of random vocalization, the speech potentialities of the individual have been defined in the direction of an articulate language. At this point the interaction is no longer between random organic processes and social processes but between organic processes that have been defined and social processes that have meaning to the individual. The social processes change for the individual just as much as the organic processes, since with each new experience they take on a new meaning. The social psychologist is concerned with this interaction throughout the life of an individual whether he was born into a social situation or came into it from another cultural complex after human nature had begun to develop.

Sociology as a distinct discipline is a study of the interaction of the past experiences of groups and individuals through the process of competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. Groups compete for status and find their cultures and interests in conflict; out of this comes a process of accommodation or assimilation of their past experiences to each other. This is only one illustration of the interaction between the past experiences of groups. The past experiences of groups manifest themselves as a social heritage of customs, standards, practices, beliefs, traditions, habits, rituals, ceremonials, and institutions. Out of this interaction come also problems that concern the sociologist, involving personal, family, and community disorganizations, so that there are

special sociologies as well as general sociology. The special sociologies dealing with personal disorganization are quite largely in the field of social psychology. The cultural heritage is made up of the social processes that are in interaction with the biological processes. This interaction is the unit of study in social psychology.

Sociology makes its contribution to social psychology through its concern in the nature of the social heritage. There is an interest in the manner in which the social heritage will limit and direct the development of human nature and make possible an inextricable relationship in which the individual and society become two aspects of the same situation.

"It is the fundamental task of the science of sociology to analyze the processes by means of which human nature is formed and culture developed. . . .

"The general problem that sociology sets for itself is a description of the social process. It seeks to discover the mechanisms of social interaction that account for the development of personality and the changes in culture."¹ There is an interest in how the social basis of human nature is changed through interaction with the organic base when human nature is produced. How are traditions and cultural patterns altered and how do folkways and mores become a part of habitual responses in human nature are questions in point. What is the nature of the social heritage that distinguishes it from the environment of other animals and how do cultural opportunities, social values, and definitions eventuate in the diversified abilities of human beings? How do cultural experiences modify native organic traits? These are some of the inquiries that fall within the realm of sociology.

Psychology is a study of the physiological processes and the anatomical structure of the organism in those aspects of the structure that are related to behavior. Psychology proper, as distinguished from social psychology, is physiological in its interest and is concerned with *how* a human being acts. Social psychology is concerned with *why* a person behaves as he does. The psychologist often enters the field of social psychology as does the sociologist. When the psychologist gives courses in Applied Psychology, Industrial Psychology, Business Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Theories of Personality, Behavior Disorders in Children, and other similar subjects, he is in the field of social psychology in part, at least. In experimental, comparative, and physiological psychology the psychologist is quite largely in the realm of pure psychology. Courses similar to those last mentioned make psychology a distinct discipline that draws heavily on biological data.

The psychologist is interested in those organic attributes that come from the biological inheritance and which differentiate man from other animals and make it possible for human nature to develop. He turns

¹ REUTER and HART, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

his attention to that portion of the original nature of man which forms the organic basis for a life organization and studies the character of the physiological equipment important for adjustments in a complex and ever changing social organization.

In his study the psychologist is no longer looking for instincts but is trying to understand and make intelligible to others tendencies, predispositions, undefined capacities, and organic potentialities that may be socially defined. It is the degree of plasticity of the organism in developing human nature that gives him concern. He wants to know how original capacities eventuate as factors in the diversified abilities of human beings. In his thinking it is essential to know how organic tendencies and potentialities become a part of habitual responses; how reflexes are conditioned; and how all native traits are modified in social experiences.

He is no less interested in the nature of the random emotional capacities and how these can be defined. Mental capacities, individual differences, and special abilities on an organic level are his data. Neural structures, glandular activities, and visceral disturbances are considered by the psychologist. He looks for the inherited, integrated structures that are valuable for human nature and tries to determine how they are modified and how they limit and in a way direct the development of human nature.

The psychologist includes in his program of study the structure connected with and physiological processes of the senses of touch, taste, hearing, sight, and smell that make them the contact between the organism of the individual and the social heritage of the person. There are organic needs and appetites that must be understood as the basis of many habits, desires, likes, and dislikes once they are socially defined. The psychologist is interested in the mechanism and capacity for articulate speech, for color discrimination, in fact in the structure, function, and capacity of any physiological characteristic that has to do with organic processes that eventually interact with social processes. The psychologist, then, is concerned with the unlearned behavior tendencies and tries to find out all he can about the organic processes and potentialities before they interact with the social processes and what happens to them once the interaction is under way. In short, he is interested in the *individual* and not the *person*, when he is a pure psychologist.

A. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE PERSON

A further distinction between psychology and social psychology can be drawn by showing the difference between the *individual* and the *person*. The study of the *individual* is a study of organic processes and anatomical structures, while the study of the *person* is a consideration of

the social adjustments made by the individual that lead to the development of human nature.

Most of the experiments in the psychological laboratory are studies of the *individual* and fall, of course, in the field of psychology. A certain test shows that a subject breathes more rapidly when he is lying. This is a physiological reaction common to all individuals, though no two persons are alike. What the social psychologist wants to know is why this human being developed a life organization that led to lying, not that he breathes more rapidly when he lies. The test shows how the human organism reacts, but it shows nothing about the process by which the individual's personality developed. There are persons who would not be guilty of perjury, and the explanation would be different in each case where lying takes place. Furthermore, one always breathes more rapidly in any emotional situation. Whether lying or telling the truth, breathing more rapidly is a physiological reaction and might be the same for a criminal as for a law-abiding citizen.

Another laboratory experiment which is a study of the *individual* is the test which shows that one's blood pressure increases when he is angry at another person. This is a physiological reaction. What the social psychologist wants to know is why a person is resentful. Many persons in the same situation would not have been wrathful at all. The social psychologist wants to know why the individual's personality was organized to result in its peculiar reaction through the interaction of the biological and sociological processes. Blood pressure may be increased quite apart from emotions—from overeating, for instance.

Still another test in the psychological laboratory which is a study of the *individual* is the use of the fatigue machine. Fatigue is a physiological reaction. The social psychologist whose point of reference is the *person*, is concerned with the attitudes that accompany fatigue. How does the person behave when he is fatigued? What is his method of relaxation? Will he rest or dissipate? What is his attitude toward society—his philosophy of life? There are many more tests, but these will suffice to show the difference between the *person* and the *individual*.

One might take sight or any one of the other senses to show the difference between the *individual* and the *person*. If one studies the anatomy of the eye and the physiological function of the eye, he is interested in the *individual*. If he is interested in the development of personality through the sense of sight, he is concerned with the *person*. Most standard textbooks in the field of psychology give a picture of the eye with a complete description of the anatomy as well as its physiological reaction. The structure and function of the eye are given, but these do not show the personality value of the eye. They reveal nothing about the rôle of the sense of sight in the development of human nature and human behavior.

Seeing includes a biological process which may limit the sense of sight, but the background experience of the individual, the social process, determines the interpretative seeing of the individual. Two persons may have the same vision so far as the biological process is concerned, but they will evidence different attitudes in any observation because they see in terms of a different background of experience in the social process. So it is the social process in interaction with the organic process that determines the human nature of the person, his attitudes, desires, and philosophy of life.

What is valuable to the student of social behavior is what one sees and the interpretation he puts on it out of his background of experience and the attitudes he develops as a result of having seen. One could study the anatomy, that is, the structure and physiological reactions, of the eye of a criminal and then of a law-abiding citizen and not discover any difference between the two persons. There is a great difference, however, and this difference interests the social psychologist.

The social psychologist is concerned with what each one has seen and what interpretations each one has put on his observations out of his background of experience. What attitudes have these two persons developed through the sense of sight that made one a criminal and the other a law-abiding citizen? Incidentally the eye of some other mammal would be as valuable as the human eye for studying the individual, but that would not hold true for the study of the *person*. James¹ has suggested the eye of the bullock for this purpose. No one would try to explain human personality through the eye of some other mammal. The anatomy and the function of the eye are the same for every normal individual, but in each case personalities are quite different. This illustrates the distinction between the *individual* and the *person*.

In the process of reading it has been assumed that the eyes move smoothly along the line of print on the page. Through experiments psychologists have shown that this is not the case. The eyes do not move steadily along the line but move in a series of jumps that are interpolated by brief pauses, at which times the person visualizes what is before him. The findings of these experiments are valuable in relation to the study of the *individual* but they do not show any difference between the radical and the conservative or any other opposite types in society.

The same situation exists regarding the senses of hearing, touch, and smell. The biological processes are valuable only for explaining the fact of these senses and how they function, but they do not reveal the personality value of these senses, as we shall see later in the discussion of the social psychology of the senses. These senses make the contacts between the organism and the social heritage, but the biological processes con-

¹ WILLIAM JAMES, *Psychology*, p. 28, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1910.