

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

AN OUTLINE AND SOURCE BOOK

BY

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To

MY HONORED CO-LABORER

FRANKLIN HENRY GIDDINGS

BOLD SEEKER AND VALIANT PROCLAIMER OF TRUTH

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

PREFACE

IT requires some hardihood to put forth this, the pioneer treatise, in any language, professing to deal systematically with the subject of social psychology. In spite of infinite pains and thirteen years of experience in university teaching of the subject, I feel sure this book is strewn with errors. The ground is new, and among the hundreds of interpretations, inferences, and generalizations I have ventured on, no doubt scores will turn out to be wrong. Of course I would strike them out if I knew which they are. I would hold back the book could I hope by longer scrutiny to detect them. But I have brought social psychology as far as I can unaided, and nothing is to be gained by delay. The time has come to hand over the results of my reflection to my fellow-workers, in the hope of provoking discussions which will part the wheat from the chaff and set it to producing an hundred fold.

Nothing puts an edge on one's thinking like coming on new and interesting truth mixed, nevertheless, with some error. Therefore, if the young science is to advance rapidly, its friends must not be too fearful of being found wrong on a few points. Let each prospector — to change the metaphor — empty out his sack of specimens before his brother prospectors, even though he knows their practised glance will recognize some of his prized nuggets as mere pyrites. Then it will not take long to locate the rich veins.

So I offer this book with the wish that what in it is sound be promptly absorbed into the growth of the science, and the unsound be as promptly forgotten. Indeed, the swiftness of its disintegration will measure the rate of progress of the subject. If it is utterly superannuated in twenty years, that will be well; if, in ten years, it is a back number, that will be better. Perish the book, if only social psychology may go forward! Hence, I beg messieurs, the discreet critics, to lay on right heartily, remembering that in showing its errors they are triumphing *with* the author, not *over* him.

At the moment of launching this work, I pause to pay heartfelt homage to the genius of Gabriel Tarde. Solicitous as I have been to give him due credit in the text, no wealth of excerpt and citation can reveal the full measure of my indebtedness to that profound and original thinker. While my system has swung wide of his, I am not sure I should ever have wrought out a social psychology but for the initial stimulus and the two great construction lines—conventionality and custom—yielded by his incomparable *Lois de l'imitation*. If only this expression of my gratitude could reach him!

EDWARD ALSWORTH ROSS.

MADISON, WISCONSIN,

May, 1908.

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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

SOCIAL psychology, as the writer conceives it, studies the psychic planes and currents that come into existence among men in consequence of their association. It seeks to understand and account for those uniformities in feeling, belief, or volition — and hence in action — which are due to the interaction of human beings, *i.e.*, to *social* causes. No two persons have just the same endowment. Looking at their heredity, we should expect people to be far more dissimilar and individual than we actually find them to be. The aligning power of association triumphs over diversity of temperament and experience. There ought to be as many religious creeds as there are human beings; but we find people ranged under a few great religions. It is the same in respect to dress, diet, pastimes, or moral ideas. The individuality each has received from the hand of nature is largely effaced, and we find people gathered into great planes of uniformity.

Social Psychology treats of social planes and currents

In shifting attention from the agreements in which men rest, such as languages, religions, and cultures, to the agitations into which they are drawn, it is natural to change the metaphor from *plane* to *current*. The spread of the lynching spirit through a crowd in the presence of an atrocious criminal, the contagion of panic in a beaten

army, an epidemic of religious emotion, and the sympathetic extension of a strike call up the thought of a *current*, which bears people along for a time and then ceases.

Social psychology differs from sociology proper in that the former considers planes and currents; the latter, groups and structures.¹ Their interests bring men into coöperation or conflict. They group themselves for the purpose of coöperating or struggling, and they devise structures as a means of adjusting interests and attaining practical ends. Social psychology considers them only as coming into planes or currents of uniformity, not as uniting into groups. Since the former determine the latter more than the latter determine the former, social psychology should precede rather than follow sociology proper in the order of studies.

Social psychology pays no attention to the non-psychic parallelisms among human beings (an epidemic of disease or the prevalence of chills and fever among the early settlers of river-bottom lands), or to the psychic parallelisms that result therefrom (melancholia or belief in eternal punishment). It neglects the uniformities among people that are produced by the direct action of a common physical environment (superstitiousness of sailors, gayety of open-air peoples, suggestibility of dwellers on monotonous plains, independent spirit of mountaineers), or by subjection to similar conditions of life (dissipatedness of tramp printers, recklessness of cowboys, preciseness of elderly school teachers, suspiciousness of farmers).

¹The present treatise is, therefore, by no means the same as *psychological sociology*, for it omits the psychology of groups. The writer doubts whether it is practicable or wise to treat the psychological side of sociology quite apart from the morphological side.

Relation of
social psy-
chology to
sociology
proper

Planes pro-
duced by a
common en-
vironment
or experience
are not
social

Social psychology ignores uniformities arising directly or indirectly out of race endowment — negro volubility, gypsy nomadism, Malay vindictiveness, Singhalese treachery, Magyar passion for music, Slavic mysticism, Teutonic venturesomeness, American restlessness. How far such common characters are really racial in origin and how far merely social is a matter yet to be settled. Probably they are much less congenital than we love to imagine. "Race" is the cheap explanation tyros offer for any collective trait that they are too stupid or too lazy to trace to its origin in the physical environment, the social environment, or historical conditions.

Race traits
are not
social planes

Social psychology deals only with uniformities due to *social* causes, *i.e.*, to *mental contacts* or *mental interactions*. In each case we must ask, "Are these human beings aligned by their common instincts and temperament, their common geographical situation, their identical conditions of life, or by their *interpsychology*, *i.e.*, the influences they have received from one another or from a common human source?" The fact that a mental agreement extends through society bringing into a common plane great numbers of men does not make it *social*. It is *social* only in so far as it arises out of the interplay of minds.

Social planes
arise from
human
interactions

Social psychology seeks to enlarge our knowledge of *society* by explaining how so many planes in feeling, belief, or purpose have established themselves among men and supplied a basis for their groupings, their coöperations, and their conflicts. But for the processes which weave into innumerable men certain ground patterns of ideas, beliefs, and preferences, great societies could not endure. No communities could last save those held together by social pleasure or the necessity for coöperation. National

Social
psychology
sheds light
on society

characteristics would not arise, and strife would be the rule outside of the group of men subject to the same area of characterization.

and on the
individual

It seeks to enlarge our knowledge of the *individual* by ascertaining how much of his mental content and choice is derived from his social surroundings. Each of us loves to think himself unique, self-made, moving in a path all his own. To be sure, he finds his feet in worn paths, but he imagines he follows the path because it is the right one, not because it is trodden. Thus Cooley¹ observes: "The more thoroughly American a man is, the less he can perceive Americanism. He will embody it; all he does, says, or writes will be full of it; but he can never truly see it, simply because he has no exterior point of view from which to look at it." Now, by demonstrating everywhere in our lives the unsuspected presence of social factors, social psychology spurs us to push on and build up a genuine individuality, to become a voice and not an echo, a person and not a parrot. The realization of how pitiful is the contribution we have made to what we are, how few of our ideas are our own, how rarely we have thought out a belief for ourselves, how little our feelings arise naturally out of our situation, how poorly our choices express the real cravings of our nature, first mortifies, then arouses, us to break out of our prison of custom and conventionality and live an open-air life close to reality. Only by emancipation from the spell of numbers and age and social eminence and personality can ciphers become integers.

Divisions of
social
psychology

Social psychology falls into two very unequal divisions, viz., *Social Ascendancy* and *Individual Ascendancy*, the determination of the one by the many and the determina-

¹ "Human Nature and the Social Order," 36.