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# PSYCHOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL PATTERN



*Founded by KARL MANNHEIM*

# PSYCHOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL PATTERN

by



 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1945 by  
Routledge

Reprinted in 1998, 2000, 2002  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Transferred to Digital Printing 2007

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group*

First issued in paperback 2013

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library

ISBN13: 978-0-415-17790-0 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-86414-5 (pbk)

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PSYCHOLOGY  
AND THE SOCIAL PATTERN



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*Founded by* **KARL MANNHEIM**

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## PREFACE

Different psychologists with their varied approaches and interests have fostered the development of psychology in many different directions. From each of the principal developers psychology has gained a great deal. Sometimes the gains have carried with them certain elements of disadvantage, as when the followers of the original exponent of a doctrine have been led away by their ardour to ignore the contributions of those with whose views they disagree, but on balance the gain to psychology as a whole by the divergence of views of its exponents has been considerable.

My own prejudices and antipathies will probably become obvious to the reader as he wends (or ploughs) his way through this book. I should prefer to leave it to him to discover them for himself rather than to make out a list of all those of which I am consciously aware. I must, however, make a few comments about some of them which have importantly influenced the choice of topics in, and the arrangement of, the book.

I have attempted to give some account of most of the major contributions to experimental psychology and to introduce these contributions into those parts of the book where they seemed to be most relevant, but what has influenced me more than anything else has been an attempt to bring out the *social* aspects of those topics which are generally discussed in textbooks on psychology, and also to try to forge a link between the topics usually confined to textbooks on general psychology and those which are more usually discussed in textbooks on abnormal psychology. At first I intended to write a textbook on social psychology, but as the planning of the book proceeded I felt that it was first of all necessary to see how far the social aspects of general and abnormal psychology could be explored. Then, having cleared the ground, I could proceed, as I hope to do, to discuss the social framework into which human beings are born—the effect on their behaviour of heredity, race, sex, class and family life—and then to discuss the social relationships which impinge upon and influence their behaviour in society. These topics I hope to discuss in two forthcoming books.

One chapter heading which is found in practically every textbook on psychology has not been included in this book.

That is a chapter on learning. The reasons for this are first that part of what I have to say on the subject is to be found in the chapter on motivation, and secondly that I hope to deal with the topic in much greater detail (in so far as it concerns human beings) in a future book on developmental psychology.

This book, therefore, should be regarded as the first part of an attempt to estimate the interaction between the individual and society. I hope and believe that the topics and the treatment hang together sufficiently closely for it to be able to stand on its own, but I have constantly held at the back of my mind a picture of its relationship to the other topics which I have planned to discuss in the future.

\* \* \*

I would like to thank Professor Morris Ginsberg for the trouble he has taken in reading through the entire script and in making valuable comments on it. It was he and L. T. Hobhouse who first introduced me to, and interested me in, social psychology many years ago. I was subsequently influenced very considerably by the ideas of Kurt Koffka with whom I worked in America, thanks to the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation, and by the extension of the Gestalt views to social psychology which is implicit in the books of Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead and Otto Klineberg. On the clinical side I am indebted to the wisdom and stimulation of Dr. Aubrey Lewis with whom I worked at the Maudsley Hospital.

The greatest debt of all during the past fifteen years I owe to the inspiring leadership and constant encouragement of Professor F. C. Bartlett to whom I dedicate this book in gratitude and affection.

HADSTOCK, ESSEX.

*May, 1944.*

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# PSYCHOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL PATTERN

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

People behave in all manner of ways. Sometimes their behaviour is the result of the influences which have impinged on them in the small family group, the bigger school group, or the still bigger institutional or national groups in which they have been brought up. Each of these groups has its own manners and customs, traditions and conventions, and these are so strong that the single individual is often swamped by them if he tries to behave in a way which is contrary to them. More often he simply accepts them as the proper way to behave.

Let us take as an example of this what might happen to a person who enters one of the great professions, let us say the army. It may sometimes happen that a young man entering the army finds a number of ways of behaving that he cannot understand. With his natural impetuosity and his desire to get things done quickly, and with his necessarily incomplete knowledge of all the facts, he cannot understand the delay that sometimes occurs in coming to decisions. But these decisions may have a whole host of implications about which he is completely unaware. The applications and the requests for this and that which have to be made through the "proper channels" originally at any rate had some reason behind them, though the exact reason may not be quite clear even to the young man's superior officers. All this sort of thing, therefore, he wants to alter: it appears to him to be nothing more than pig-headed obstinacy on the part of an antiquated, perhaps even prehistoric, animal. But having only just entered the army himself he does not possess any power to make the alterations he desires. He decides, however, that as soon as he has reached a responsible position he will make a clean sweep of all these hindrances and go down to history as the man who brought the army up to date. But what in fact usually happens to a young man like this? As he works his way up to positions of greater power he not only

begins to see some of the reasons why the formal channels are sometimes the best, but he also tends to become so imbued with the general army atmosphere and way of doing things that he begins to think quite genuinely that it is the best way. Besides, by the time he is reaching a position of real power he is getting a good deal older, and his youthful impetuosity and ardour are becoming somewhat dulled and dimmer. He no longer wants to do things quite so quickly and feverishly as he did when he first joined up. All these factors—particularly, perhaps, the assimilation of the military manners and customs, conventions and traditions—lead him into the position of *not wanting* to make those radical changes that he wanted to make when he was younger. The institution of the army has affected his behaviour in an extremely important way.

This kind of thing really belongs to the province of social psychology, and one of the first things that this book attempts to do is to try to pick out from the topics which the general psychologists have written about and described, those aspects which have a bearing on the problems of social psychology. What is there in general psychology that is of interest and use to the social psychologist? Can we find any indication in the facts about perceiving, thinking, remembering, ability, temperament, motivation and emotion which the general psychologists have described so often and so fully of the way in which the groups or cultural patterns in which people have been brought up are affecting those people's behaviour in these respects? That is the first problem.

A second problem is that though most people will have their behaviour modified by the groups to which they belong, yet there will always remain some people who in spite of (or sometimes because of) the traditions and customs, manners and conventions of their groups, behave in ways which conflict with those mores. Such people tend to become the maladjusted individuals in their groups, the deviants from the usual ways of behaving. What we have to do in the second place, therefore, is to see whether a link can be forged between the normal ways of behaving, which are the general psychologist's province, and the abnormal, maladjusted ways which are usually described in books on psychiatry. What we shall try to do is to investigate the relationship between "normal" and "abnormal" behaviour. Once again our starting point is the point of view of the general psychologist.

## PERCEIVING

There are various factors which may be regarded as objective and which influence the way in which things are perceived. These partly depend on the structure of the eye or the ear, the nerve endings in the retina and other sense organs, the fact that we have two eyes, and other physiological conditions of this kind. Then there are factors which have been studied in detail by psychologists which depend on the stimuli themselves—things like the strength or the size of the stimuli, the way in which they are grouped, their similarity and so on. But in addition to these objective conditions there are a number of subjective conditions. Some of these depend principally on the influence of a person's social environment, and some depend to a more important degree on the temperamental make-up of the individual himself. It is at these two points, therefore, that we may look for the link between, on the one hand, general psychology and social psychology and, on the other hand, between general psychology and abnormal psychology in so far as perceiving is concerned. Thus some of the experimenters on perceiving have shown that in many perceptions there is a degree of inference. Now the kind of inference that is drawn may mainly depend on the fact that in a particular group of people it is customary to infer in a particular way (e.g. that when one is alone in a house at midnight with the wind howling outside, any creaking floorboards or sudden unexpected sounds are being made by someone or something with an evil and hostile intention against one): or it may mainly depend on one's own peculiar temperamental and emotional make-up (e.g. to take an extreme example, that a ring at the bell at midday when the sun is shining brightly out of doors, and one has one's family about one, portends the arrival of a horrid hunchback, dressed in red and with a cleft foot).

Perceptions which principally depend on objective factors are, so far as we can judge, usually seen in the same way by everybody, and this is true also of those illusions which depend on a particular kind of physiological stimulation for their appearance. Anyone who perceives them perceives them in the same kind of way, though in fact the way they are seen is different from what they really are. Other perceptions depending principally on social factors are also fairly generally shared within that particular community. But there are still others which

are far more individual, depending on a person's particular interests and attitudes. These range all the way from a tendency to perceive more of a particular kind of object than most people whose interests have not been developed along these lines, through illusions and hallucinations to delusions or false beliefs. It is often very difficult to draw a precise line of demarcation between these different types of behaviour, e.g. to say whether a particular piece of behaviour is a false perception or a false belief. Thus it might be more accurate to classify the example of the inference that a ring at the bell portended the arrival of a devil as a false belief rather than as a false perception. But for reasons that will be found in Chapter II I think that these two types of behaviour are closely connected.

#### BELIEFS

Beliefs as well as perceptions depend on both social and on individual factors. There is a tendency in Western civilisation to believe things to be true when they fit in and agree with the existing logically coherent system of facts. There is in many respects a social pressure towards scientific and experimentally established facts. But there are in addition a number of social pressures of a more emotional kind. In primitive communities these are much more widespread than in our own community. There we find numerous social pressures towards beliefs in magic, witchcraft, omens and spells. Even in Western civilisation, however, there are many emotionally determined social pressures. These sometimes take the form of widespread types of wishful thinking, when, for example, a particular group is fighting for its existence. But they also take less specific forms as well. The prevalence of superstitions, even among those who have had the benefit of a scientific education, indicates how strong these tendencies may be. Most people who consciously reject a piece of superstitious behaviour, or who purposely do something which they know is running contrary to the superstition, have a slightly uncomfortable feeling as they do so, for they are then doing something which conflicts with the popular belief. Their behaviour is consciously directed against the manners and customs of their fellows, and their feeling of malaise may spontaneously arise from this cause. In these ways we can trace the influence of the beliefs of the group on the behaviour and the beliefs of the individual within it.

In other cases we can see how individual factors are of more

importance than social factors in determining a person's beliefs. This frequently happens in scientific research, giving rise to new discoveries or to new theories which conflict with the existing beliefs of the social group. In such cases the determinants of the new belief are principally based on rational grounds, and after a while it may be that the new theory passes into and among the accepted beliefs of the group. But in other cases the principal determinants of individual beliefs are emotional. Without consciously allowing himself to realise it a person has to believe certain things because he cannot face the difficult problems of adjustment to his social group if he believes otherwise. He has to believe that his neighbours are gossiping about him because he raises his sense of self-importance thereby, and he cannot face the realisation of his true insignificance. Sometimes these emotionally-determined beliefs reach a fantastic degree of complexity, as in the systematised delusions of schizophrenic patients. In these one often sees a train of thought worked out with faultless logic to a towering height of elaboration, without the individual being able to appreciate the fact that though he has drawn perfectly correct conclusions from his premises, yet those premises themselves are hopelessly inaccurate. Thus if a patient believes that the Chief Rabbi, the Minister of Labour, the proprietor of the *Daily Express*, and the managing director of Nobel Industries are jointly engaged in a plot to hound him from his job it will be possible for him to associate the most trifling annoyances of his daily life with one or other of these eminent gentlemen and to defend the association with convincing argument. Given his implicit belief in his premises the association of necessity follows. And anyone who does his best to cure the patient of his delusion will be in danger of being immediately regarded as an agent of his enemies, for one thing the patient must avoid at all cost (though he does not consciously realise it himself) is the painful process of readjusting himself socially. The quickest way to rid himself of the unwelcome attempts of a doctor to cure him is to classify him at once as a hostile agent. Then it is no longer necessary to pay any attention to what he says.

Sometimes the individual and false beliefs arise through inadequacies in a person's intellectual make-up. In such cases his beliefs may be based more on rational than on emotional grounds, but his intellectual deficiencies lead him to the wrong conclusions. Such may be seen in cases of intellectual impairment due, let us say, to gunshot wounds in the head or to organic

deterioration as the result of alcoholic intoxication, syphilitic infection or senility. Or they may be due to an innate lack of mental ability, to a mental defect which prevents a person from developing his ideas and thoughts to the same degree of complexity as other people.

Thus in thinking, as in perceiving, a relationship may be discovered between the provinces of the general psychologist and those of the social psychologist and of the psychiatrist.

### REMEMBERING

The same thing is true of remembering. Recent experimental work has brought out the importance of the processes of inference and of construction in all attempts to remember. These processes are as much affected by the forces arising within a person's social group and by those which result from his own peculiar temperamental and intellectual make-up as are the corresponding processes in perceiving and in thinking.

The influence of the social group on the kind of things remembered and on the number of things remembered is an aspect of anthropology and of folk-lore that has not at the present time been developed very far. Such work as there is, however, indicates that there are very important and very interesting differences between different social groups, with different traditions and ways of life, and the kind of things that are remembered as well as on the total amount remembered.

More material exists on the individual aspects of the matter. It can be shown that individuals with different temperamental and emotional make-ups show marked differences in the quality and quantity of the things they remember, and when one passes beyond what is usually regarded as lying within the normal range of divergence from the average, when one passes to the patients who are suffering from impairment of their mental processes, one sees at once the importance of the constructive processes in remembering. Many of these patients show disturbances of remembering which closely resemble delusional symptoms. Thus a patient may describe a visit he has recently paid to the landlady in whose house he lived for many years, and say that as he went away at the end of the visit the little kitten to which he had been very attached when he was living there sat up on its hind legs and put its front paws to its eyes to catch the tears that were pouring down its cheeks. But as the disturbances in their mental processes mainly affect things which

are remembered it is more convenient to consider them under this heading than under disturbances of systems of ideas and beliefs. Nevertheless here again the precise line of demarcation is very difficult to draw.

Just as some false beliefs are principally determined by emotional causes and others by intellectual inadequacies, so too there are impairments in memory which are due more to emotional than to intellectual limitations. Just as we sometimes believe what we want to believe, so too we sometimes forget what we want to forget. This may concern a relatively unimportant matter, such as a dentist's appointment, or, in a more extreme form, it may take the shape of a hysterical loss of memory embracing an inability to remember one's own name, to recognise one's relations or one's own home, etc. In such cases some fairly obvious situation from which the patient wishes to escape can usually be discovered by the psychiatrist, though the patient himself will not consciously admit its existence.

### ABILITY

When we turn to ability and intelligence it seems at first difficult to see how different social environments can possibly affect them. Yet we do not have to look far before we realise that though the social environment cannot increase the amount of a person's intellectual endowment, it may considerably affect the extent to which he can make full use of the amount of ability he possesses. It is quite possible for a person with an excellent native endowment never to have an opportunity to develop his potentialities to the full, because he has never been in an environment which will allow them to develop. The point is even more important when one considers the results of intelligence tests, for intelligence tests are regarded by many people as fairly accurate measures of the amount of native intelligence a person possesses. Yet there is a large amount of experimental evidence to show that the ability to answer intelligence test questions is affected very considerably by the kind of environment in which a person is brought up.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly the case with tests which are based on language and the use of words, for verbal facility or relative literacy is affected to an important degree by the kind and amount of education a person receives. But it is also true of tests which are not based on language. This is not to say that

<sup>1</sup> Apart from some of the evidence that is mentioned in Chapter 5 a great deal more will be found in my forthcoming book, *The Framework of Human Behaviour*.



intelligence tests are of no practical value. On the contrary they are of very considerable use when the people being compared are known to have had a very similar background of education and experiences. They are particularly useful in indicating the relative degree to which children in the same school or in the same types of school have benefited by their education. But their limitations should never be overlooked when one is trying to make a comparison between the innate abilities of people—particularly adults—who have been subjected to the influences of widely different social groups. Thus when one applies intelligence tests to groups of people of widely different ages in order to try to get a picture of the growth and decline of intelligence with age it is impossible to pick out from a decline in test scores in the later age groups the relative importance of a decline in interest in the kind of things that the test questions ask about, the different effects on different people of the habits and interests of different social groups, or the real decline in innate ability due to the natural processes of mental impairment as the result of old age.

In these ways therefore it is possible to trace the influence of the social group on intelligence test scores.

It is also possible to trace the relationship between "normal" and "abnormal" ability. When abnormality consists of an excessive degree of verbal facility a person tends to be regarded as extremely brilliant and his intelligence test score is usually very high. But if his asymmetry in mental development has taken a different direction, if, for example, he is an almost illiterate mechanical genius, he may find himself incarcerated in a home for mental defectives. Our social group attaches such overwhelming importance to verbal and linguistic proficiency that it is unwilling to treat those whose abilities lie principally in other directions with the same consideration. This is not to say, of course, that some people do not have a general defect in their abilities which incapacitates them from any possibility of social adjustment. But it does, I think, imply that more attention ought to be paid to differences in types of ability and disability.

#### TEMPERAMENT AND TYPES

This leads us to the general question of types and temperaments. As with ability so with temperaments there is a fundamental difference between the kinds and degrees of temperamental characteristics of many people, and these may depend, in part at



least, on the balance of their glandular secretions. The influence of the social group or groups in which a person develops also frequently plays its part as well. The fact that some people look more attractive than others, or are more lively than others, means that there will be differences in the ease with which they will get on with their fellows. Those who are dull and unattractive will have to work hard to gain the social acceptance which seems to come to others quite naturally and without the expenditure of any effort. Those who are dull or unattractive may even give up the struggle and seek self-sufficiency within a very narrow circle. Thus, because they gain ready admittance to many social groups those who are bright and attractive may spontaneously develop and improve just those characteristics which increase the ease with which they get on with their fellows, and just because they have difficulty in mixing with others those who are dull and unattractive may increasingly lose confidence in their ability to get on with other people, and so find it increasingly difficult to mix with others.

So the reaction of one's social group to one's inborn characteristics may foster or discourage the development of differences in temperamental characteristics. And similarly the differences in innate temperamental endowment may materially affect the way in which people react to groups of their fellows.

### MOTIVATION

When we turn to the question of motivation we find that many psychologists have defined and described a whole host of what are called *instincts*. These are usually regarded as innate patterns of behaviour which are common to all the members of the same species. But however useful the concept may be when it is used to describe certain types of behaviour in insects and birds, the traditions and customs of human groups lead to so much modification in the behaviour of their individual members that the concept can no longer be regarded as of much value for descriptive purposes so far as human beings are concerned.

Anthropologists have shown that even what are regarded as the most fundamental of human tendencies, namely maternal behaviour, sex behaviour, acquisitiveness and pugnacity are subject to considerable modification, and that in groups in which the social pattern happens to be of a certain character, the individuals within that group tend to behave in ways which conflict with these so-called fundamental tendencies. Thus in