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AN INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY

Book 1: Introspective Psychology of the Normal Consciousness
Part 2: Concrete Conscious Experiences
Chapter 23: The Social Consciousness
Section 1: Forms of Social Consciousness

The Mob Consciousness, the suggestibility of the mob, the reflective Social Consciousness and Social Leadership

This preliminary illustration of the wide extent of imitation is a fitting introduction to our study of the social consciousness. The social consciousness has two forms or stages, of which the first is fairly well described as the mob-consciousness; for the second, there is no adequate name, and we shall somewhat awkwardly call it the reflectively social consciousness. The crowd, or mob, is a group of selves, of whom each one imitates the external acts and the unreflective consciousness of the others. The mob, however, in so far as it concerns the social psychologist, is consciously imitative. It is probably true, to be sure, that mob-actions may be unconsciously performed. The most serious-minded may be carried out of bounds at an exciting football game, and may wake up to find that, quite unconsciously, he has himself joined lustily in ear-splitting yells during several mad minutes. But this unconsciously active mob is the concern of the sociologist. The social psychologist's interest is limited to the group of people who realize their imitativeness, who are conscious, however vaguely, of shared experiences and actions, who know that they are joining the shout of a thousand voices, or that they are rushing on in a great, moving mass of people. Such vague social consciousness the people of the mob almost always possess.

We have next to remark the strict limitations of the mob-consciousness. The individuals who compose it share each other's perceptual and emotional experience, but their actions are too precipitate to admit time for thought, and they are too deeply swayed by emotion, to be capable of loyalty or of deliberate will. The mob-consciousness is not only fundamentally imitative,

but utterly lacking in deliberation and reflection, and it is therefore capricious and fantastic. For this reason, the acts of a mob are absolutely unpredictable, since they spring from the emotions, notably the most temporary of our subjective attitudes. The fickleness of the crowd is, therefore, its traditional attribute; the mob which has cried aloud for the republic rends the air with its *Vive le Roi*, and the Dantons and Robespierres, who have been leaders of the crowd, become its victims.

What is sometimes called the insanity of a mob is in reality, therefore, a psychological, not a pathological, phenomenon. Every emotion and passion gains strength as it is shared, and is characterized by reactions of increasing vigor. The accelerated force of primitive emotions, shared by scores and hundreds of people, is for a time irresistible, the more so, because both emotions and the acts which go with them are unchecked by reasoning or by deliberation. No one supposes that the crew of the *Bourgogne* deliberately trampled women down, in an effort to reach the boats. No one imagines that the Akron mob would have set fire to the public buildings, when they knew that the man whom they sought had escaped, had they reasoned the matter out. Seamen and citizens alike were a prey to elemental passions uncontrolled by deliberation.

The activities of a mob may, none the less, be constructive as well as destructive, ideal as well as material. Gustave le Bon, a brilliant French writer, lays great stress on the capacity of a mob to perform capriciously generous deeds as well as cruel ones; and he instances the crusades as example of a great altruistic mob-movement. "A crowd," Le Bon says, "may be guilty of every kind of crime, but it is also capable of loftier acts than those of which the isolated individual is capable." It is, however, perfectly unequal to any logical conclusions, any reasoned acts, any purposed, planned or deliberately chosen performance. Whether it drive the tumbril or rescue the Holy Sepulchre, its action is purely emotional and capricious, and it takes its cue unreflectively from the leader of the moment, for "a man . . . isolated . . . may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd he is a barbarian."

The suggestibility of a crowd is so well marked, that it is regarded by certain writers as a form of hypnotization. [Boris Sidis, "The Psychology of

Suggestion."] This suggestibility extends even to the sense-experiences of the crowd, which is, therefore, subject to actual sense-illusions. Le Bon brings forward instance after instance of these collective illusions, for example, the phantom raft, seen by the whole crew of the Belle Poule, and the St. George who appeared on the walls of Jerusalem to all the crusaders.

Many modern writers, Le Bon among them, believe that trie crowd or mob is the only social group. They thus completely identify the crowd with 'society,' teaching that the mob-consciousness is the only type of social consciousness. From this doctrine, we have good reason to dissent most emphatically, for we clearly find in human experience what has been named the reflective social consciousness. We shall try to illustrate and later to define it. We may compare, for example, the reflective national consciousness with mob-patriotism. We are all familiar with the mob-activities of so-called patriotism: the shouts, the fire-crackers, the flag-wavings. They are all a part of the contagious feeling and action of a lot of consciously, but unreflectively, imitative selves. A reflective national consciousness is an utterly different sort of experience. The possessor of it has certain deep-seated social conceptions, ideals and purposes; these have their significance to him as shared with a group of selves, who are consciously related with himself and with each other. These principles and ideals would be meaningless to the reflectively social individual, if they were merely his own. Yet he individually adopts and promulgates them, and he acts them out at the primaries, at the polls and in public office. Such a reflective national consciousness may well be emotional, but it is not purely emotional, and its emotional attitudes are constant, not temporary and capricious.

Different forms of college spirit illustrate the same distinction. To cheer oneself hoarse at the athletic meet, and to join the men who carry the hero of the games in triumph from the field, may be a mere manifestation of mob-consciousness, an unreasoned, unpurposed wave of feeling, which carries one off one's feet in the contagion of a great enthusiasm. But there is also a deliberate college spirit. The student is profoundly conscious that his pursuit of a well-shaped, academic course, of a life of close social affiliations, and of an honorable college degree, is the aim of hundreds of other students. He realises that he is imitating and, in some ways, leading them, and that they

are both imitators and leaders of each other and of him. He more or less clearly recognizes that his advance is an alternate imitation of his teachers and his fellows, and a reaction against them. His degree has a purely social value dependent on other people's estimate of it. In a word, his college life is consciously and reflectively social.

Our illustrations have paved the way for our definition of the reflectively social consciousness, as (1) the reflective adoption of, or domination over, the external activities and the conscious experience of other selves, who (2) are regarded as forming a social group. Such a group of reflectively social persons may be called 'society' in contrast with the crowd or mob. [Baldwin, "Social and Ethical Interpretations," Chapter XII.]

The best way, in which to bring out the meaning of this somewhat abstractly worded definition, is to contrast the reflecting social consciousness with the mob-consciousness, in more detail. The most fundamental characteristic of the reflective social experience may be thus described: the reflectively social person realizes that his own consciousness and his acts are imitations of the other members of his social group or are models for them; he realizes, also, that the consciousness and the actions of every other member of the group are, similarly, either patterned on the feelings and deeds of the others or else suggestive of their experiences and activities. One consciously imitates, opposes or leads others, with the consciousness that they are similarly related to oneself and to each other. This recognition of social relations is evidently a reflective and deliberate affair, and forms no part at all of the mob-consciousness. The individual in the crowd, though he may indeed have the vague feeling of companionship, does not know that his acts are the result of social contagion. If you ask him why he shouts, or rescues, or kills, he tells you that he cannot help it; and he is right, for imitation is an unreasoning instinct, and although his acts are influenced by those of the group to which he belongs and by the acts of their common leader, yet he does not reason about this imitativeness or clearly realize it. The reflectively social individual, on the other hand, is profoundly conscious of the influences, the imitations and the counter imitations, of the social organization. The reflectively social consciousness may be, in the second place, deliberate as well as immediate, thoughtful as well as emotional. This is its most obvious distinction from the

mob-consciousness, to which it is likely at any moment to give place. The legislative assembly or committee meeting, as it should be, is a manifestation of the reflective social consciousness, not swayed by the feeling of the moment, but carefully reasoning, deliberately adopting this or that recommendation, and passing motions only after long consideration. The assembly or meeting, as it actually is, is often enough a frenzied mob in which passion excites passion, and deliberation is an unattainable ideal.

The reflective social consciousness is, finally, no longer merely imitative. The reflectively social person is aware of his power to lead, as well as of his capacity to follow. This tendency of the developed social consciousness has been greatly underemphasized. Tarde, for example, as has already been said, believes that the essential nature of society is imitativeness. "*Socialité*"," he says, "*c'est l'imitativite*." ["*Les Lois de L'Imitation*," p. 75.]
It is perfectly evident that this definition leaves out of account the characteristic attitude of the leader of society. Even those who have confused society with the mob have been the first to acknowledge the leader as related to the mob, yet not a member of it. "A crowd," Le Bon declares, "is a servile flock incapable of ever doing without a master." ["The Psychology of the Crowd," p. 113.] In truth, however wide the place we make for imitation as a social function, it can never displace spontaneity and leadership. The charge is lost when the officer falls, and the mob disperses when its leader wavers. Customs and conventions and fashions are imitations which are dominated by invention, and every institution is, as Emerson said, 'the lengthened shadow of a man.'

Nobody can deny that these masters of men, these captains of industry, these world conquerors, are men possessed of social consciousness. We certainly cannot attribute social feeling to the Old Guard and deny it to Napoleon. We cannot assert that the doers of the law have a realization of a public self, society, and that the makers of the law are without it. The sense of moulding the common purpose, of inflaming the public feeling, and of inciting a group of selves to imitative action, is as truly a social consciousness as the realization that one is imitating the thoughts and feelings and acts of a group of similarly imitative selves, at the inspiration of the same leader.

This dominating phase of the reflectively social consciousness does not belong to the great leaders and masters only. On the contrary, every reflectively social individual may assume the dominating, imperious attitude, as well as the imitative, acknowledging attitude. Anybody may, moreover, adopt this position not only toward individuals but toward society the reflectively social group whose members are realized as either imitative of each other or as dominating each other. The consciousness of this imperious attitude lies at the basis of what is known as the realization of one's moral influence. One may go to religious services and observe church festivals, not as a personal duty, but because one believes the observances socially valuable, and is conscious of one's actions as likely to influence other people's. More than this, as our study of will has suggested, a dominating, not an imitative, attitude toward society is entirely possible when one is not master of a situation, and when, rather, one is leading a forlorn hope or, single-handed, defying a mob. Thus, the experience of Sokrates was profoundly social when, in the Heliastic Court, he stood alone for a legal trial of the generals of Ægospotami, while the Athenians, beside themselves with horror over the unburied crews, were crying out for quick vengeance on the leaders of that luckless sea-fight. Certainly Sokrates was conscious of himself as opposing, not a single man nor any fortuitous aggregate, but all Athens, a composite, group-self, whose members were being swept on in a universal passion to a common crime.

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