The Foundations Of Social Science, An Analysis Of Their Psychological Aspects

Mickel Williams James
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THE FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
An Analysis of their Psychological Aspects

BY
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New York ALFRED A. KNOPF McMxx
TO

MY FATHER, MOTHER, AND SISTER,
WITH WHOM THESE STUDIES OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
WERE BEGUN AND CARRIED ON FOR YEARS,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
PREFACE

The increasing dissatisfaction with the traditional formulations of the facts of history and social science has stimulated a search for causes in the human motives that make history and determine the phenomena of social science. How far causes of this fundamental kind can, with strict scientific accuracy, be ascertained, is becoming evident from an increasing volume of research. The results suggest the possibility of an underlying science of social relations, less objective than the other social sciences, but having a field and method of its own. The cultivation of this science, it is maintained, will not only co-ordinate the work of social scientists in different fields but will yield a distinct body of scientific knowledge and principles. Social psychology will justify its claim to be recognized as an accredited science if it can be shown (1) that it has a distinct field which can be dealt with scientifically, and (2) that the other sciences which have to do with human relations assume a little known psychological field from which are drawn explanations of phenomena in their own fields. Our task is, therefore, (1) to indicate what is the relation of the science of this little known field to the other sciences of social relations; (2) to offer an analysis of this little known field.

"The Foundations of Social Science" treats of the relations of the science of this new field to the other social sciences. If it can be shown that the analyses of unsolved problems of the other social sciences, as pressed by the more earnest scientists, converge toward this new field, if certain conceptions about the little known field have formed in the minds of scientists in other fields, then we may assume that it demands our study. The obstacles encountered will not all be intellectual. Every advance in science has encountered conservatism in high places, and the opposition of interests which thought their position and prestige jeopardized thereby.

In addition to this volume on the psychological aspects of social science, I have five others which will be published as business conditions permit. The second book carries out the purpose of the
first and explains the relation of social psychology to another field of knowledge, the criticism of literature and art. The third book begins the analysis of the processes of social psychology. It offers an analysis of the conflicts of types of behaviour throughout social organization,—in family relations, economic relations, political relations, professional relations, ecclesiastical relations, artistic standards and educational relations. This book treats one distinct branch of social psychology—the conflict of interests in social relations, and the suppression of instinctive impulses and its social effects. The fourth book treats another branch—the processes of feeling and thought through which instinctive interests are adjusted; the fifth another branch—the processes of personality that must be facilitated for social adjustment; the sixth another branch—the processes of social control. Each of these six books, as written, is entirely distinct from the others. Doubtless it would have increased their scientific value had it been possible to publish them as originally intended—as separate volumes of one work—but business conditions made this impossible. They have a logical connection, but they are so written that each treats a distinct branch of the subject and is complete in itself.

It goes without saying that the author’s work can be fairly judged only by going through the series. A part of an entirely new science can be understood only by understanding the whole. More than one of my critics said that they made notes as they went along but eventually destroyed most of them, for they found that the points in question were later dealt with. The critics will, therefore, want to go on through the series before passing final judgment on any one book. Nevertheless, for the general reader, and for class-room use, each book is intelligible without the others.

Social psychology has distinct branches, as has economics—consumption, production, distribution, value and exchange, the relation of the state to industry. And as there is no exact agreement among economists on the main divisions, after a century of cultivation of the science, so there is no agreement among social psychologists. It has seemed to me that what the science needs first is a treatise on each of the main divisions. Having thus developed all branches of the science, it will be possible to formulate in one volume a more or less abstract statement of the elementary principles of the science. But to attempt to do so without having previously cultivated all its branches would be to make the mistake
made by the deductive formulation of economic principles from
hedonistic premises before the branches of that science had been
intensively cultivated. A logically compact body of principles is
so seductive that it may obsess the mind long after the principles
have become palpably untrue. Still further to emphasize the need
of inductive studies instead of abstract statements, I have in prepa-
ration a series of volumes on "Inductive Social Psychology" which
are studies of the psychological processes of various groups.

In writing these books I have written not merely as a student for
students, but for that increasing number of men and women who
have a desire for some understanding of the society in which we live.
Consequently I have taken pains to be clear, to avoid abstraction,
to follow closely and concretely the processes which seem to me
essential in human society. Inasmuch as this is the first attempt
at an extended exposition of social psychology, the treatment must
be more concrete than would otherwise be necessary. The nature
of the subject, therefore, has encouraged the writer to ignore the
distinction unusually made between the serious student and the
general reader and to write more concretely than is usual for the
serious student, and with more numerous citations and references
than is usual for the general reader.

These books were not written under the influence of the war
period. They were begun long before and most of them were
ready for publication in 1917, but business conditions were then un-
favorable for their publication. Accordingly I have had an oppor-
tunity to make such additions as were suggested by the great epoch
through which we have passed, and by the books and articles which
appeared during that period, so that the work may be assumed to
be up to date, so far as it has been in my power to make it so. But
the underlying processes of human nature were not changed by the
war, though the full significance of the great events and their under-
lying currents cannot be discerned at present. The science of social
psychology is not completed. Long ago the Greeks were working
at it, so are some of us, and so will those who follow us to the end
of time.

Parts of the manuscript were submitted to specialists in those
fields a knowledge of which is necessary for the social psychologist,
and the author has had the benefit of their criticisms. These spe-
cialists are: Dr. Charles A. Beard, Dr. Wesley C. Mitchell, Dr.
James H. Robinson, and Dr. Leo Wolman, lecturers in the New
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School for Social Research, Dr. Henry R. Mussey, managing editor of the Searchlight, Mr. Henry T. Noyes, a manufacturer and civic leader of Rochester, and Professors Franklin H. Giddings and Edward L. Thorndike of Columbia University. While the suggestions of these critics have been carefully followed out, all but two read only a very small part of the work, and no one of them read it all so that the author must take the sole responsibility for the ideas expressed. I think my critics agree that social psychology has an intimate relation to their particular fields, whether or not they agree with my analysis of the relation, which constitutes the first volume; and that social psychology, of which the succeeding volumes offer a formulation, is a science that has great possibilities and is a challenge to intellectual work that is eminently worth while.

To my colleague, Professor Walter S. Gamertsfelder, I am indebted for invaluable assistance in the proof-reading.

JAMES NICKEL WILLIAMS.