THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TOGETHERNESS.

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IN his chapter on "The Wisdom of the Body", Sir Charles Sherrington describes the intricate structure of the human eye with "about 137 million 'seeing' elements spread out in the sheet of the retina", which make it so marvellously responsive to changes in the light that falls upon it. He then goes on to speak of the "wonder of wonders".¹ The eye sends to the brain streams of tiny electrical charges which have hardly anything in common with a visual image; and yet it is "the streaming crowd of electrified shifting points in the spongework of the brain" that makes us see shaped and coloured objects in the world outside us. "Electrical charges having in themselves not the faintest element of the visual—having, for instance, nothing of distance; . . . nor colour, nor brightness, . . . nor near, nor far . . . —yet conjure up all these."

We have here an interesting example of the way in which changes in our physical environment produce minutely coordinated changes in our bodies, just as in other instances, changes in our bodies effect changes in our environment. But "the wonder of wonders" is that under suitable conditions these physical interactions are associated with events of quite another order. They are intimately connected with thoughts and feelings and endeavours which form part of our conscious mental life, and with which they have little if anything in common.

This strange conjunction of the physical and mental is one of the basic facts which psychology must recognise, and no account of our mental activities can be satisfactory which fails to take full account both of the fact itself and of the experiences to which it gives rise. We ought, for instance, to give due weight to the conditions under which our two-sided interactions with

¹ Man on his Nature, ch. iv, p. 128.
things take place. The nature of these conditions can be illustrated by an example.

In order that I may recognise a friend in the street we must obviously both be members of the physical world in which in certain circumstances changes in one member are followed by changes in another. Within this world we must make our co-membership effective by being together in a particular situation in which my eyes can in fact respond to my friend’s appearance and movements.

But, secondly, this physical togetherness is not enough. I shall not notice my friend unless he has importance or value for me. He and I must be together in a realm in which things have value for each other in virtue of being the things they are, or, we may say, in virtue of their intrinsic worth. They then change each other, not by their external interactions, but by increasing or diminishing each other’s worth. Figuratively speaking, they change each other from inside. I see my friend because to do so makes my life, perhaps to a very small extent, either more or less worth living.

It might be shown that this second condition holds good of all our conscious dealings with things as well as persons. Only when it is satisfied does physical togetherness have any meaning for us. We can even have value-togetherness with only a very remote kind of physical togetherness with the objects which have value for us.

The necessity of value-togetherness and its priority over merely external togetherness are reflected in our experience. For we never consciously deal with things unless we feel that they in some way concern us, that is, have some positive or negative value for us. It is our sense of their value that leads us to take account of them as having their places in the scheme of things and therefore their own being and worth. Thus children clearly show that they think of things as real because they are important to them personally. Children thus come to live in little worlds composed of persons and things with which they have value-togetherness and whose properties depend primarily upon the particular kind of value they possess.¹

¹ See, e.g., H. Werner, Entwicklungspsychologie.
In later years our sense of togetherness with things takes a rather different form; for we deal with them as external objects more or less independent of ourselves. We may be active in asserting ourselves against them, in which case our underlying togetherness with them is less definitely felt. But the feeling persists, at any rate in the background. For we are aware of people and things as co-operating or antagonistic fellow-members of situations in which we and they play interconnected parts. This awareness may be vivid or vague, but it would seem to be rarely altogether absent. Boys playing in a group game keenly feel their togetherness both with other members of their team and with their opponents. We have the same kind of feeling towards tools and instruments and machines which enable us to achieve our purposes. When I drive a car I feel that we are both engaged in a common enterprise in which success depends upon our effective co-operation. But the most vivid experience of togetherness is that exemplified by a man’s love for a maid, a mother’s for her children, and a patriot’s for his country.

This sense of togetherness is as essential an aspect of our experience as is our awareness of being independently active. In it we consciously live the principle that things cannot interact at all unless they are members of wholes in which changes in one member may effect changes in other members. If we ignore this principle and its reflection in our experience, we take a narrow and distorted view of our mental activities, and cannot begin to do justice to the close connection between our external interactions and our own mental life.

When some psychologists describe our activities as responses to external stimuli, they may assume our togetherness with the things which stimulate us, but they do not emphasise its importance. They tend to give the impression that the mind and its objects have little connection with each other apart from being brought into external contact, either by the forces the environment exerts or by the mind’s own activity. For example, some Gestalt psychologists speak of the systems of objects to which we react as dynamic wholes which, as K. Lewin says, pull and push us in accordance with their nature.¹

¹ See B. Petermann, Das Gestaltproblem, p. 306.
Or we may be described as opposing ourselves to the world outside us. "In every action", writes Sir Percy Nunn, "I say to the world, openly or implicitly, I am here to be reckoned with; I go a way that is, as far as may be, my own way and not merely yours".¹ W. McDougall's well-known definition of the inborn instincts or propensities, "which set the ends and sustain the course of all human activity", expands this conception of our active dealings with the outside world. "An instinct is an innate disposition to perceive (to pay attention to) any object of a certain class, and to experience in its presence a certain emotion and an impulse to action which find expression in a specific mode of behaviour in relation to that object." ²

These examples, which might easily be multiplied, illustrate a widespread view of mental activity which has strongly influenced psychological thinking and practice. In spite of differences of emphasis, our interactions with things tend to be conceived like those of material bodies, and they are often described in terms derived from physics and mechanics. An instinct or other motive is represented as determining the mind's activity in much the same way as the force of gravitation determines the motion of a stone. We can think of a stone as falling by its own weight, or as pulled downwards by the earth. Similarly, the mind may be impelled by some force inherent in its nature, or by a force exerted by its environment. But the analogy remains.

Psychologists who share this general conception of mental activity have done much valuable work in explaining a wide range of mental phenomena. When, however, they assume that their standpoint enables them to survey our whole mental life the limitations of their outlook become apparent. Their preoccupation with our dealings with things as external leads them to do less than justice to the prior necessity of our value-togetherness with things not simply as external objects but as possessing value and therefore intrinsic worth.

For example, they are apt to isolate certain activities, such as those of perceiving and cognising external things without fully realising that these activities are significant expressions of

¹ Education: Data and First Principles, p. 29.
² Outline of Psychology, p. 110.
our efforts to respond more fully to the value of things. In these efforts our whole selves are engaged, not only certain powers or aspects of our minds. Thus, perception is sometimes described as a purely intellectual activity by which we learn what the outsides of things are like or how they sound or smell. The truer view, as Whitehead insists, is that we begin by feeling the value or importance they have for us, and then go on to find out what they are like. We are also physically active in adjusting ourselves to the situation as having meaning and value for us. We are therefore active more or less with our whole body-minds; we do not merely use a particular power to perceive.

In the same way the acquisition of knowledge is often discussed as the process by which we ascertain and co-ordinate certain facts. Such factual knowledge is vitally important, but we gain it as one result of a comprehensive course of activity in which feeling and effort as well as reason and imagination play their parts. Moreover, we hardly ever want simply to know things as facts. We want to know what value they have for us and other people, and perhaps their intrinsic worth. Such value-knowledge is not less important than factual knowledge; it helps us to penetrate below the surface of things and within our limits to know them in themselves. This is the kind of knowledge a mother has of her children, an appreciative reader of a poem, and a conscientious man of his duty.

Again, the one-sided stress laid on what we can broadly call external activities had led to the comparative neglect of experiences in which our value-togetherness with persons and things is vividly felt. In love and loyalty, in devotion to duty, and in the wholehearted enjoyment of beauty we do not deal with things primarily from outside. We identify ourselves with them by actively responding to their intrinsic worth. This attitude and the experiences it involves receive scant attention in some textbooks. Our moral, aesthetic and religious experiences may indeed be hardly discussed at all. Some psychologists go so far as to disclaim any concern with the ethical or other worth of our activities. They ignore the vital difference between our experience of doing what we feel to be right, and our experience of doing the same kind of thing when we know it is wrong.
But perhaps the most disastrous result of the narrow view we are criticising is that it leads us to regard our mental life as naturally self-centred. When we picture ourselves as living by constantly interacting with external things, we almost inevitably suppose that we either respond to them in ways advantageous to ourselves or try to bend them to our will. As Nunn says, we want to go our own way and not merely theirs. The interests we seek to satisfy need not be concerned solely with our own well-being; but we seek to satisfy them because they are our own. It then becomes difficult to understand why we may feel most freely active when we are taking no account of our individual desires or welfare, but are devoting ourselves to aims compared with which our personal fortunes are regarded as unimportant. This difficulty is apparent, for example in McDougall's laborious attempts to account for moral self-sacrifice as a product of self-centred tendencies.1

In order to do justice to the experiences not only of saints and heroes, but of all of us at our best, we must, I suggest, take full account both of our external interactions and, more particularly, of our togetherness with things. What conception of our mental life will then approve itself I shall not attempt to forecast in detail. But authoritative writers have provided us with a provisional outline which I shall try to sketch in my own words.

Following their lead we can distinguish three connected stages in a normal process of mental activity and regard these stages as belonging to different levels of conscious mental life. As Whitehead among others insists, the first stage of the process is that we become aware of living in a situation that has actual or possible value for us. We respond to its value by feeling some form of pleasure or pain, which involves a sense of intimate togetherness with the situation as a whole, or, as W. Stern puts it, of being embedded in it.2 Our attitude, Whitehead tells us, can be called sympathetic in the wide etymological sense of that term. For we feel in another and conformably with another.3 In other words, we feel our togetherness with the situation as a whole.

1 See his Social Psychology, ch. viii.  
2 Allgemeine Psychologie, p. 730.  
3 Process and Reality, p. 227.
We do not as a rule consciously experience this type of togetherness as a separate stage in our course of activity. But on some occasions we do so, and we may even subordinate our dealings with things as external objects to our sense of togetherness with them. When I find myself in an unfamiliar room I may have a feeling of discomfort before I know what caused it. On being introduced to a stranger my first response may be a feeling of pleasure at meeting him. If I unexpectedly encounter a bull in a lane, I may be so vividly aware of being involved in a dangerous situation that my feelings dominate my whole experience; I may not even distinctly see the bull nor try to run away. On the other hand, when I am luxuriating in a hot bath the mere pleasure of being in it dissuades me from being externally active.

We are, however, very rarely so absorbed in either a very pleasant or a very painful or dangerous situation as not to feel impelled to make it in some way more pleasant or less painful. The impulse becomes a conscious motive when, as rational beings, we view the situation from outside, both as it actually is and as it may become. We then distinguish various aspects of the situation and various objects in it; and we become active in dealing with them as external and therefore separate from ourselves. A young child in his earliest days cries when he is uncomfortable as an instinctive response to the felt disvalue of the situation in which he finds himself. By degrees he learns to recognise his mother as an actual or possible source of help. He then cries as a proved means of getting her to help him.

The stage or level of experience and activity on which the child thus enters has engaged the special attention of psychologists, and its importance is recognised in practice by us all. In so far as we are active on this level we live in a world of persons and things that are actually or potentially real and important in their own right. What we try to do is not in the first instance to make ourselves more comfortable; it is to effect actual changes in the objective situation which will make it in some way more valuable from our point of view. This is a very different kind of activity from that involved in responding to the whole situation as our feelings demand. It involves objective purposes and rational thinking, deliberate initiative and some measure of
self-control. For we find we cannot have our own way without let or hindrance, nor attain our aims without external help. As G. F. Stout writes: "In being aware of ourselves as agents we are ipso facto aware of the presence of other factors which condition our success or failure. To feel ourselves active is to feel ourselves partners in . . . a total process apart from which our own action has no separable existence."\(^1\)

It follows that in dealing with persons and things other than ourselves, we have to take account of their independence and comply with their demands. To get the best out of a car we must not only treat it in accordance with the general laws which govern the use of machines; we must respect its particular idiosyncrasies. We implicitly recognise that it will serve us well only if it is itself a good car. Its utilitarian value depends in the end on its intrinsic worth. We must therefore, in our own interests, try to maintain and increase that worth.

By this change of attitude, we are partially freed from the bondage to our feelings, and consequent absorption in promoting our individual sense of well-being, characteristic of our primitive togetherness with unanalysed situations. We exercise our reasons, that is, our capacity for dealing with things as they really are, not as we want them or imagine them to be. Our feelings themselves are partially transformed. For they become less exclusively those of pleasure and pain, and involve some measure of satisfaction or dissatisfaction due to our success or failure in attaining objective ends.\(^2\) At the same time we experience definite emotions; for we directly respond by our feelings to the worth and value of things.

When, however, we thus distinguish external things from our own reactions to them we realise a new and higher form of togetherness with them. We no longer simply repose in their arms or try to free ourselves from their embrace. We are active with them or against them in enterprises in which we and they are mutually concerned and in which we strive to achieve objective aims.

In so far as we are thus active, we live primarily as members of the external world, and our sense of togetherness with things

\(^1\) Mind and Matter, p. 24.  
\(^2\) See W. Stern, op. cit., pp. 735 f.
tends to be overlaid by our experience of actively mastering our environment. But our efforts to master our environment may themselves be subordinated to our appreciation of the intrinsic worth of the people or objects or possibilities that the situation involves. A mother nursing a sick child, a man doing his duty at any cost to himself, a musician absorbed in playing or hearing a Beethoven sonata may be very active on what we may call the external-object level. But their hearts are not set on making their own wills prevail. They surrender themselves to the insistent claim of something demanding to be done for its own sake because it is intrinsically worthwhile. Their interest in their personal success or welfare counts for little or nothing in comparison with their devotion to what for them possesses a different and higher kind of importance in the whole scheme of things.

In proportion as we live on this highest level we gain living unity with persons and things, principles and ideals, identifying ourselves with them and so making our interests in them the inspiring motives of all we do. If we are active predominantly on this level we realise the highest type of living possible to us as human beings. We then experience a happiness so intense that in George Eliot's often-quoted words, "we can only tell it from pain by its being what we should choose before everything else, because our souls see it is good." We use our reasons to the full extent by responding to the true being of things in which their intrinsic worth consists; and we are most freely active in doing what we feel is overmasteringly important.

We do not often wholehearted attain this level of life, though most, if not all, of us do so at times. But the three levels of life, with the three corresponding stages of our activities, imply each other as aspects of human life as a whole. On different occasions one or other aspect will tend to dominate our experience; but in an harmonious life they form a hierarchy in which life on each level, summarily speaking, draws its material from below and its inspiration from above.

This brief sketch of our mental life is both tentative and incomplete. If, however, it were developed and amended, it

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1 In distinguishing three levels of experience and mental activity I have borrowed freely from Stern's description of the three 'modes of living'. But my levels all fall within the limits of his psychological or intermediate mode.
would seem to find room for an appreciative treatment of our experiences of togetherness and therefore of our moral, aesthetic and religious interests. It would also provide a background for a more comprehensive account of such specific activities as those of feeling and knowing.

A psychology on these general lines in fact is already being developed and applied by students of human nature who use their technical knowledge to illuminate, not to strait-jacket, their observations. To mention two names only, we find Burt doing so in his account of young delinquents, and Valentine in his study of young children. Not a few biographers, historians and anthropologists follow the same course. Above all it is the kind of psychology embodied in the life and practice of all good schools. For they are inspired by ideals of togetherness, while giving scope to individual interests.

Unhappily the psychology accepted by public opinion tends to be based on a disastrously narrow conception of our mental life. It is too often assumed that men are normally concerned with their individual interests and only on particular occasions take account of their togetherness with each other and with things of intrinsic worth. Our whole industrial system has been largely shaped by this and allied assumptions, and is with difficulty freeing itself from their pernicious influence. More generally, our efforts to create a new and better social world are not likely to succeed unless they are inspired by a fuller recognition of the motive force of togetherness and of the unselfishness of human nature at its best. The possibility of mental progress, and therefore of the advance of civilization, as Professor C. D. Broad reminded us before the invention of atomic bombs, depends “on our getting an adequate knowledge and control of life and mind before the combination of ignorance on these subjects with knowledge of physics and chemistry wrecks the whole social system”.¹ The knowledge we need cannot be supplied by psychologists alone, but they can contribute to it and so render invaluable service to the nation and, we may hope, to the progress of mankind.

¹ *Mind and its Place in Nature*, p. 666.