

THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Psychology

HUMAN INSTINCTS

BY GRACE ADAMS

TO LIMIT a discussion of instincts to psychology, and principally to American psychology, may seem arbitrary. The term "instinct" was not invented by psychologists. It received scant attention in the older scholastic psychologies. Indeed, the term was first used seriously by the biologists of the Nineteenth Century. Spencer and Darwin employed it to designate inherited traits. They were more interested in the instincts of the lower animals, and in their development, than in the study of the instinctive nature of man; and Darwin held that man had fewer and simpler instincts than any other animal. But both men did speak of, and in a very general and empirical way describe, the human instincts. In this manner the word found its way into psychology.

As soon as the biologists and physiologists had placed their subjects on a scientific footing, the psychologists sought to emulate them. The psychology of Germany patterned itself after the sense-physiology then predominant in that country and was chiefly concerned with describing the mental experiences conditioned by known neural processes. But English psychology had broader and less exact traditions. The aim of the association psychology of Berkeley and Hume had been to explain mental life rather than to describe the human mind. And an explanation of human conduct became the goal of American psychology, just as it is now the object of psycho-analysis. Biology was already in its ascendancy when psychology was introduced into America; and the typically American psychology, or functionalism, while holding to the

explanatory ideals of English associationism, took biology as its scientific model. It proved to be rather unobservant of its exemplar. It was not the method of biology, then becoming more and more critical and experimental, which it adopted; but rather its early terminology, which was broad and of necessity a little vague. As "instinct" already had psychological connotations, it was natural that it should be one of the first words taken over by the new science of psychology. But when it was taken over it had to be redefined, and it was in the redefining that psychology, especially American psychology, laid its grasp on the human instincts and claimed them for its own.

The term is still to be found in biology. But its meaning for that science has been gradually curtailed. Loeb definitely identified instincts with tropisms and held that it was "certain that neither experience nor volition play any part in these processes." And in the opinion of the majority of biologists instincts are purely mechanical processes and lie completely outside the province of consciousness. Yet when, in 1890, James wrote his "Principles of Psychology," consciousness was considered the only subject suitable for psychological treatment. There was no Freudianism or Behaviorism then. The sixth-sevenths of the mind, assumed to be submerged in unconsciousness, were left undisturbed; and Watson was still placidly absorbing the tenets of Functionalism. In view of the eruptions of psychology since 1900 it is important to note that ten years before that date James was able to state complacently that there was agreement among his contemporaries that the human instincts were: sucking, biting, chewing, grinding the teeth, licking, making gri-

maces, spitting, clasping, grasping, pointing, making sounds of expressive desire, carrying to the mouth, the function of alimentation, crying, smiling, protrusion of the lips, turning the head aside, holding the head erect, sitting up, standing, locomotion, vocalization, imitation, emulation or rivalry, pugnacity, anger, resentment, sympathy, the hunting instinct, fear, appropriation or acquisitiveness, constructiveness, play, curiosity, sociability and shyness, secretiveness, cleanliness, modesty and shame, love, the anti-sexual instincts, jealousy, and parental love.

By describing these more or less complicated movements as instinctive and yet treating them from a psychological point of view James definitely placed instincts within the scope of psychology. When he did this he admitted that "instinct is usually defined as the faculty of acting in such a way as to produce certain ends, without foresight of the ends, and without previous education in the performance"; therefore, that knowledge does not enter into its makeup. At the same time James himself held that even so simple a thing as a sensation was really a "bit of knowledge." To get around the difficulty of making a process which was by definition not consciously a suitable subject for a theory of knowledge, James called into play a device that has always aided psychologists in times of need—logical argument. An instinct may be originally blind, he agreed, but even so it is an impulse, and every impulse, once it has been yielded to, is "thereafter felt in connection with a *foresight* of its result." So it was obvious, to him at least, "that every instinctive act, in an animal with memory, must cease to be 'blind' after being once repeated." In this way, according to James, an instinct could become not only conscious but capable of modification and conscious direction and change.

James could hardly have foreseen the far-reaching consequences of thus reasoning a new psychological meaning on to an old biological term, and it would not

be fair to lay the blame for all the subsequent controversy over instincts to him. Still, when the evidence for accepting a group of phenomena into a science is based not on experimental data but on logic, there is no guarantee that this logic will be continually persuasive or that its interpretation will always be the same. And we find disagreement even among James' most immediate followers, Angell and Thorndike. Angell, accepting James' argument that instincts once yielded to are thereafter felt in connection with the foresight of their ends, expands this idea into the statement that "instincts, in the higher animals, at all events, appear always to involve consciousness." And he makes consciousness the essential element of instincts. Thorndike, on the other hand, remembers James' admission that instincts are originally blind and maintains that "*all* original tendencies are aimless in the sense that foresight of the consequences does not effect the response." For him the only necessary components of an instinct are "the ability to be sensitive to a certain situation, the ability to make a certain response, and the existence of a bond or connection whereby that response is made to that situation."

While the ideas of neither Angell nor Thorndike are actually inconsistent with James' two-fold definition of an instinct, they lead to very different lists of instincts. Angell, by making consciousness the mark that distinguishes an instinct from a reflex, has to narrow the number of instincts to fear, anger, shyness, curiosity, sympathy, modesty (?), affection, sexual love, jealousy and envy, rivalry, sociability, play, imitation, constructiveness, secretiveness and acquisitiveness. But Thorndike admits no gap between reflexes and instincts, so he must both expand and subdivide James' list. He does this in a two hundred page inventory which he regrets is incomplete. He adds such activities as teasing, tormenting, bullying, sulkiness, grieving, the horse-play of youths, the cooing and gurgling of infants and their satisfaction

at being held, cuddled and carried, attention-getting, responses to approving behavior, responses to scornful behavior, responses by approving behavior, responses by scornful behavior, the instinct of multiform physical activity, and the instinct of multiform mental activity.

The "so-called instinct of fear" he analyzes into the instinct of escape from restraint, the instinct of overcoming a moving obstacle, the instinct of counter-attack, the instinct of irrational response to pain, the instinct to combat in rivalry, and the threatening or attacking movements with which the human male tends to react to the mere presence of a male of the same species during acts of courtship. Curiosity he reduces to still more numerous and specific responses. Even the apparently simple process of reaching he considers not one instinct but three. To any human being who doubts his ability to have so many instincts Thorndike offers the comforting thought that many inherited tendencies are transitory and that possibly no one man possesses all of them.

The task of defining and enumerating the possible human instincts is not a task confined to psychologists more or less in the tradition of James. For many years the iconoclastic Watson strove to explain instincts in suitably behavioristic terms. But neither his definition nor his classification need concern us now, for in 1924 Watson repudiated everything he had previously said about them by declaring that "there are no instincts," and furthermore, that "there is no such thing as an inheritance of capacity, talent, temperament, mental constitution and characteristics." With these two statements Watson cast aside the biological as well as the psychological notion of mental inheritance. Still it is noteworthy that "instinct" was one of the few terms of traditional psychology that he did not throw overboard as soon as he adopted his behavioristic platform.

The advocates of the *Gestalt-Psychologie* also consider that a new definition of instincts is in order. Koffka thinks that a

real understanding of the gestalt will clear up all the confusion about instincts, but he does not give a classification of them which will fit his theory. But in America where the enumeration of the human instincts has become almost the duty of anyone writing a text-book of psychology, Prof. R. M. Ogden has been able to add "communism" and "integration" to the more conventional instincts. As to a description of instincts in terms of gestalt, he feels that "all we can say is that the situation seems to emerge as a patterned and somehow articulate whole within its less articulate surroundings, and that this 'emergence' involves a corresponding pattern of behavior attuned to the situation and varying with its variation until what is unrolled in time and space rolls itself up again in the completion of the act."

From this puzzling description of instincts, and from Watson's recent repudiation of all that he has said about them, and Thorndike's uncertainty about the distinction of instincts and his confessed inability to include all of them in his long inventory, it is a relief to turn to McDougall, who feels that "lightly to postulate an indefinite number and variety of instincts is a cheap and easy way to solve psychological problems, and is an error hardly less serious . . . than the opposite error of ignoring all instincts." McDougall is not worried by the lack of experimental data which all other psychologists deplore, for he has evolved seven "usual marks" by which he, single-handed, can detect an instinct. A reaction is instinctive, according to him, if it is unquestionably inborn, common to all members of the species, actuated by a felt impulse, elicited through the intellectual appreciation of a complex situation, accompanied by a peculiar emotional experience, and if it also tends to inhibit all other bodily and mental activities and to produce a specific change in the circumstances which provoke it.

It would seem difficult to discover many processes which would fit all seven of these requirements, especially after we

learn that McDougall finds instincts in their purest form among animals very low in the scale of intelligence. But he has been persistent in his search for human instincts. Twenty years ago, he could recognize with certainty only the following: the principal instincts of flight, repulsion, curiosity, pugnacity, self-abasement, self-assertion and the parental instinct; the less important instincts of sexual reproduction, acquisition, construction and gregariousness; and the minor instincts which prompt to crawling and walking. Since that time, however, he has not been idle and now he is inclined to include "laughter" among the major instincts and to class as expressions of very simple instincts: the tendency to scratch an itching spot, coughing, sneezing, yawning, urination and defecation, and perhaps an instinct to relaxation, rest and sleep. Unfortunately, this continual adding to his list seems to McDougall's critics to resemble a light postulation of an indefinite number and variety of instincts.

The descriptions of instincts which we have thus far considered have all come from systematic psychologists. Every one of these men has tried to define instinct so that it will fit logically into his particular system. If logic has led them, paradoxically, into contradictions of one another, it has also served to keep their lists of instincts somewhat within the bounds of common sense. But the educational psychologists are not so docile before the strictures of the logical. Set over against the pedagogical ideas of man's original nature, the systematic psychologists' instincts, even McDougall's self-abasement, seem sordid. For Colvin and Bagly the chief essential of instincts is that "they are directed toward some end that is *useful*." But they do not mean useful in a selfish or materialistic sense, for they are able to describe an *altruistic* instinct which is as real to them as the *predatory* instinct. And Kirkpatrick conceives of man being by native endowment even more noble. Indeed he credits to the

human being a regulative instinct "which exists in the *moral* tendency to conform to law and to act for the good of others as well as self, and in the *religious* tendency to regard a Higher Power."

The psycho-analysts, on the other hand, must have things less noble and much simpler. So we find Brill, following Freud, declaring that "everything in life may be reduced to two fundamental instincts: hunger and love; they are the supreme rulers of the world."

Thus it appears, turning from one authority to another, that there are no human instincts, that there are two fundamental instincts, that there are eight principal instincts and many minor ones, that there are sixteen (unclassified), that there are forty-two; . . . or more than can be counted. According to which authority is accepted, these instincts are: common to all men or never duplicated; transitory or permanent; indistinguishable from simple reflexes or complex mental processes; aimless or consciously purposeful. The chief cause of such disparity lies, of course, in the fact that the logical argument which introduced instincts into psychology has never surrendered its place to experimental data; and one man's reasoning is as good as another's.

Still, it is surprising that experimental psychologists willingly continue to base their definitions and elaborate classifications of instincts on evidence which they are forced to brand as empirical. This is even stranger when we realize how important they consider a true knowledge of man's native endowment. McDougall thinks "the recognition of the full scope and function of the human instincts will appear to those who come after us as the most important advance made by psychology in our time." And Thorndike points out that a complete inventory of man's original nature is needed not only as a basis of education but for economic, political, ethical and religious theories.

It would be unfair to give the impression that all psychologists have this unbounded

faith in instincts and that every one who writes a textbook manufactures a new definition and compiles a novel list. This does appear to be the usual procedure, but there are notable exceptions. Titchener considered instinct one of the catchwords of popular psychology which did scientific harm, and thought that, until there was more factual data on the subject, there could be no acceptable definition or classification of instincts. The opinions of Dunlap and Yerkes are especially worthy of attention because they have both worked experimentally with animals and have had ample opportunity to observe "instinctive" action where it is neither moral,

æsthetic nor religious. Their remarks make valid criticism of their colleagues. Yerkes says that "instinct is one of those historical concepts which has been overgrown by meaning. It is so incrustated with traditional significance that it is almost impossible to use it for the exact descriptive purpose of science." And Dunlap points out the results of this traditional significance.

Practically, we use the term instinctive reaction to designate any reaction whose antecedents we do not care, at the time, to inquire into; by acquired reaction, on the other hand, we mean those reactions whose antecedents we intend to give some account. But let us beware of founding a psychology, social, general, or individual, on such a definition.

Ethics

THE PROBLEM OF MOTIVE

BY H. M. PARSHLEY

THE behavioristic psychology seems to me to fail at an important point, salutary as it is in its insistence upon objective, unbiassed observation. Whether we can ever penetrate the consciousness of another or not, we certainly have to deal with our own private awareness; and it is difficult to see how any psychology can be complete or even passably satisfactory which fails to derive its data from introspection as well as from observation. Ethics certainly involves the consideration of motives, values, and ideals; and a scientific ethics requires genuine knowledge about these elusive matters. The primary facts in this field are the subjective feelings and ideas of which we are directly conscious; they belong to a realm of being which many philosophers are prone to regard as distinct in character from the material and therefore beyond apprehension by the method of science. But it is unnecessary to adopt this pessimistic belief. If behaviorism is really unable and unwilling to dig out and give us real knowledge about subjective things, there may well be other psychological methods that can do so.

It seems to me important to get this

idea out into the light and have its implications clearly understood, for, in my opinion, the chief support of obscurantism at this moment is the notion that motives, values, and ideals, unlike material things, are beyond the range of scientific study, and thus afford a free and exclusive field in which religion and philosophy may disport themselves authoritatively without challenge. If you don't go to church, listen to some Modernist clergyman broadcasting his sermon over the radio. The chances are very good that you will hear him say that we must accept science in its proper sphere and believe nothing that is in plain contravention of scientific knowledge in any sphere. "But," he will go on to say, "today as never before the world needs spiritual guidance. At a time when standards are falling all about us, when vice and crime are rampant and nothing seems to be held sacred, at this time when the old sanctions and the old taboos have lost their force, we can be rescued from a hopeless materialism only through motivation by faith in the values and ideals of religion."

Very good; values and ideals are important elements in human conduct. But which religion shall it be? Christianity? No doubt. But shall it be the values and