ΤΕΣΣΑΡΑΚΟΝΤΑΕΤΗΡΙΣ

ΘΕΟΦΙΛΟΥ ΒΟΡΕΑ

ΤΟΜΟΣ ΠΡΩΤΟΣ

ΕΝ ΑΘΗΝΑΙΣ
ΤΥΠΟΙΣ: "ΠΥΡΣΟΥ,, Α. Ε.
1940

THE FRIENDLINESS AND UNFRIENDLINESS OF SOCIAL GROUPS

by

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1. Introduction.

It is with considerable pleasure that I join in this tribute to Professor Boreas. He has for a long time been known and honoured in this country for his important and distinguished contributions to philosophy and psychology, for his genuine and practical enthusiasm for the development of learning and culture, and for his unfailing courtesy and friendliness towards English speaking students. The topic which I have chosen to discuss is one not only of fundamental practical importance at the present time, but also, it seems to me, singularly fitting in this international celebration of the life work of a philosopher and psychologist who has consistently striven to maintain and increase friendly social relationships between different cultural groups within a disturbed world.

2. Culture Contact.

It is beyond dispute that the problems involved in the contact of cultures have become vastly more acute during recent years. Many of the most brilliant advances of modern science have the effect of bringing social groups which hitherto have lived in relative isolation into close working relationship. The wireless, the cinema, television, all the prodigious development of rapid and easy locomotion, mean that no group can live to itself, and none can be left alone to die. Every advance of popular education, every achievement of applied science which puts the envied resources of the world within the reach of

more and more people, breaks down barriers between one group and another which the course of history has often built. It is true, and strange, that these very inventions and discoveries are now being used in some quarters, in a desperate attempt to produce the completely selfcontained social group. But it is difficult to believe that such an effort can ever be permanently successful, because the very means which it has to employ have their natural effect in widening, instead of contracting, the range of contact of group with group.

There is no lack of appreciation of the problems that arise as a result of increasing contact between culture and culture. Everybody knows that upon a reasonable understading of the conditions that determine friendliness and unfriendliness between different social groups the whole future of civilisation may depend. But there is a great and a lamentable lack of well-directed efforts to solve these problems. The first tendency everywhere, when different social groups are forced into contact, is to set up costly, elaborate and complicated machinery to regulate and control the resulting interrelationships. But regulation without knowledge is futile, control without understanding is dangerous. Arbitration Boards, political and legislative bodies, select committees of all sorts are continually in conference. Their predominant concern is with machinery. What they build with sense is frequently wrecked by sentiment. They may leap ahead with intelligence, and be stopped by public inertia. They are at once rational and unreasonable. They may provide beautiful working devices for an ideal world, but all too often they make little study of the real state of affairs.

All this is easy enough to say, but it is of small use when it has been said. For there is no lack either of recognition of the fact that the world can be ruled only if first it is understood how the world *is* being ruled, that human beings can be directed only if first it is known how, within their present behaviour, they *are* being directed. The difficulty is that the methods which are being exploited in order to acquire this necessary knowledge seem inadequate to their task. Anthropologists may attempt to study the effects of culture contact in relatively simple social groups by a method of direct observation, but many of the most urgent problems concern the

interrelations of extremely complex and large societies, and in this field the present methods appear to be acutely unsatisfactory.

3. Methods for a Study of Culture Contact in Complex Societies.

The efforts which are now being made to understand the ways in which human dehaviour is directed when two or more complex groups come into effective contact in the main follow two methods.

First there is the immemorial way of «trying to think it out» I should be more than sorry if I appeared for one moment to underestimate the importance of this. But human problems cannot be solved as if they were exercises in logic, and all fruitful thinking about them must be based upon an adequate knowledge of the facts. Two hundred years ago David Hume foresaw the development of a «science of man» not founded upon speculation, but upon accurate observation and the use of the experimental method. We must, he wrote, «glean up our experiments from a cautious observation of human life and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by man's behaviour in company, in affairs and in their pleasures. When experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared we may hope to establish on them a science which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility, to any other of human comprehension». This necessity for a factual basis is so obvious that most of the thinkers who have tried to arrive at principles about why people behave as they do in social groups have adopted a method of wide, comparative, historical surveys. Such a method, useful though it must be, commonly involves many questionable features and assumptions. Probably the most difficult is the troublesome, but much loved, assertion that «Human nature never changes». Even supposing that this is true, in the sense that the fundamental human motives remain the same at all ages in all settings, yet the immense development of popular education and the conquest of the world of speed have now completely altered both the range and the rapidity with which the stimuli that arouse these motives can operate. In these ways both the temporal and the spatial effects of the events

that arouse the fundamental tendencies of man have changed radically within the last few years. Apart from other considerations, this meant the historical survey can be extremely misleading, unless it is closely related to an equally careful study of the contemporary scene. It is therefore not surprising that the last fifteen years or so have seen an enthusiastic and often uncritical development of attempts to obtain exact information about human attitudes, beliefs, tendencies and motives in regard to contemporary social problems. The psychological instruments that have been used have been forged mainly in America. They consist chiefly of the interest-inventory, the questionnaire and the rating-scale.

It is exceedingly easy to be critical concerning many of the ways in which these instruments have been used. Most people who make them seem to be afflicted with a disease for completeness. For example, a recent questionnaire, widely used in an attempt to find out something about the human and social effects of a period of intense economic depression, contained originally something like three humdred items. These were reduced eventually to 132 items(1). All the questions can, no doubt, be answered in a somewhat off-hand manner, but even if they are it is a day's work to get through the whole list, and at the end of the day any conscientious person is likely to feel most unsatisfied with his work. Moreover there is hardly any social situation that can reasonably be depicted in the form of a simple question, hardly any interest that can be given much significance outside of a setting, hardly any characteristic that cannot be rated in many different ways and in accord with many different values. The results of the use of interest inventories questionnaires and rating-scales are usually given an elaborate statistical analysis. Apart from the fundamental consideration that perhaps human experiences do not possess the logical properties of numbers, more often than not the only

(1) See *Personality in the Depresstion*, Rundquist E. A. and Sletto R. F. University of Minnesota, Institute of Child Welfare, Monograph Series No 12. 1936. An excellent survey of all these methods may be found in *The Assessment of Psychological Qualities by Verbal Methods*, Vernon P. E. London, Industrial Health Research Board, Report No. 88, 1938.

justification for treating these kinds of data as comparable at all is the naive belief that constancy of verbal formulation means an equal constancy of underlying problem.

At the same time the methods to which I have just referred do possess many advantages. They do elicit actual opinions and beliefs about actual social problems. They render possible the collection of such opinions and beliefs on a large scale, from the ordinary person as well as from the expert. That they present their problems in altogether too undefined a manner is a difficulty which, as I now hope to show, can to some extent be overcome.

4. An Experiment Described.

Other methods of approach to a study of the effects of culture contacts are possible. It is, for example, possible to organise special experimental groups, to bring them into effective contact, and then directly to observe the resulting modifications of social organisation and behaviour. This method is now being tried, especially in America by Professor K. Lewin and Dr R. Lippitt, and a beginning has been made in this country. The difficulties are that the groups involved must be small, to some extent artificially contrived, and in general they must belong to the same community. Nevertheless the results are promising and the method deserves widespread application in all countries. It can equally be applied in the case of «natural» groups in the workshop and the factors in the school and the village, in urban and city communities, in work and in sport (1).

The method which I propose to illustrate, however, is in essence a development of the questionnaire. Three general working hypotheses are involved. The first is that if opinions are sought with regard to the probable effects of the contact of groups, it is important that the precise nature of the contacts and of the specific groups concerned should be described with some detail, and that both the problems and the groups should fall reasonably within the range of experience of the subjects whose opinions are to be collected. The second is that if there

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(1) See e. g. *Experiments on Autocratic and Democratic Atmospheres*, Lewin K. The Social Frontier, Vol. 4, 316 - 319.

are widely spread opinions and beliefs about the bases of social friendliness and unfriendliness within a group, those opinions and beliefs will directly affect behaviour in the groups concened should the appropriate conditions be secured. The third, perhaps less obvious, but, I think, not less important hypothesis, is that when results have been secured with regard to possible harmony or discord between social groups belonging to the same general community, they must not forthwith be extended, without further investigation, to the case of groups belonging to different communities, and especially to different national groups. No doubt all three hypotheses could be questioned, but I do not propose to attempt any argument about them here.

Two social groups are selected who lie well within the range of experience of the people whose opinions and beliefs are going to be elicited. Certain outstanding features or characteristics of these groups are depicted. With some detail circumstances are now related which indicate that these two groups have endeavoured to conclude a friendly agreement. Subjects are asked to judge whether it is likely that the agreement will be permanent or will dissolve in disharmony. They are also given the opportunity to state without comment those factors in the case described which mainly influenced their judgment.

This is the general character of the method which has been used widely during the last two years, in connection with the Laboratory which I have the honour to direct. Various students also are trying the same experiment among the Indians of the North West Pacific Coast, among the Bantu of Northern Rhodesia, among the Eskimo in East Greenland and among native tribes bordering the Desert of Sahara. All of them report that the method is working well, and when the results come in from these outlying regions comparative material of great interest will be available.

Four instances have been fairly widely used in this country and in Scotland. The first depicts an attempted agreement between two groups of workers in the same industry whose economic interests widely overlap a group of skilled engineer workers on the one hand, and one of unskilled labourers on the other. The former group is depicted as radical, democratic, educated and intelligent; the latter as conservative, autocrati-

cally led, uneducated and of relatively lowly intelligence. The second instance depicts an attempted agreement between two contrasted and hitherto unfriendly religious groups in a small English village, the agreement having been arrived at as a result of common action to combat the effects of a disastrous drought. The third instance takes the case of an attempted union of two religious organisations in Scotland and more or less follows the line of a recent denominational agreement in that country. The fourth instance tells how two English sporting groups, one entirely amateur and the other partly professional, each occupying a social grade markedly different from the other, are induced to attempt fusion. In some instances a gramophone record has been made so as to ensure that all subjects hear the material given with the same emphasis and intonation.

The results secured have demonstrated certain things beyond question First, when instances of attempted friendliness or unfriendliness between social groups are presented in this manner, almost all ordinary people find no difficulty in pronouncing decisive judgments as to their probable eventual outcome. Secondly, the judgments elicited reveal widespread agreement within all homogeneous social groups who have submitted to the experiment. Thirdly, while there is great agreement as to the probable continuance of friendliness or unfriendliness between the groups in question, there is less, though still substantial, agreement concerning the mechanisms through which the final issue will find expression. Fourthly, althouh all the groups of subjects used have been unselected, there has been in all instances so far much less emphasis laid upon economic causes as producing social concord and discord than a great amount of current speculation and practice would suggest.

The actual distribution of judgments in the cases so far studied may, of course, suffer change in a wider survey. But they have, up to the present, remained remarkably consistent. They are as follow:

In case I, the two economic groups: for continuing friendliness, 30 %, for recurrent unfriendliness 66 %, 4 % remaining neutral. Two reasons for the breakdown of the agreement are

given overwhelming weight, the first being the difference of the groups in intelligence, and the second their difference in social organisation, the one having democratic and the other despotic leaders.

In case 2, the religious groups: for continuing friendliness, 90 %, for recurrent unfriendliness 10 %, none being neutral. The reasons almost always assigned for permanent agreement are: religious differences are rapidly becoming less practically important, and common education for the village children (this was stated to have been secured as a part of the agreement) will overcome any lingering unfriendliness of their elders.

In case 3, the sectarian groups: for continuing friendliness 11 %, for recurrent unfriendliness 14 %, while the remaining 15 % considered either possible according to conditions not fully stated in the story as told by the experimenter. The reasons assigned for permanent agreement were partly local ones but mainly had to do with the «social prestige» accruing to, one of the two groups concerned through the attempted agreement. Social prestige appeared to nearly all our subjects as a potent influence on the side of harmony berween different social groups.

In case 4, the sporting groups: for continuing friendliness, 50 %, for recurrent unfriendliness 14 %, 36 % remaining neutral. In this instance, again, the continuance of friendly relations was considered likely mainly on account of the social prestige which the professional group might obtain as regards status, and the amateur group might win as regards results.

Generalising, it may be said that the English and Scottish subjects who have taken part in onr experiments have picked out the following conditions as favourable to the maintenance and spread of friendliness between different social groups: fairly comparable levels of education and intelligence, social prestige increased to one side or both by friendly relations, the common education of children, and, a long way behind the other influences, overlap of economic interests. They have selected the following as unfavourable to such friendliness: marked differences of educational attainment or of intelligence, such differences of social organisation as democratic and autocratic lea

dership, and the general effect of a radical as contrasted with a conservative outlook.

Certainly, if different case material were used, other conditions just as important as these in popular esteem, and just as relevant to the issues of social harmony and discord, could be demonstrated. It would also be poss ble to survey and collect opinions and beliefs concerning the conditions of concord and discord as they affect national groups, or particular communities belonging to different nationa' groups; and this should be done.

5. A Brief Discussion of the Experimental Results.

The method which I have described is obviously of preliminary significance only. Opinions may be widely spread and yet not in accord with the actual facts. But the preliminary collection of popular beliefs about the bases of social concord and discord is necessary. Without it direct historical and contemporary observational study is at a loss where to begin and how to direct its problems.

Moreover something practical is gained immediately. Suppose, for example, economic or political exigencies bring two groups into effective contact, the groups differing notably in educational attainment and general intelligence level. And suppose that in either of the groups concerned it is widely believed that these differences offer an insuperable obstacle to the continuance of friendly relationships. The setting up of elaborate machinery of contact, of boards and committees for arbitration and discussion, and the drafting of paper agreements, will almost certainly be of little avail. For machinery will rarely be efficiently used when those who have to work it are convinced of its inadequacy for the purposes for which it has been invented. Either the educational facilities and intelligence level of the one group must first be lowered, or those of the other must be raised. Which policy is adopted is not the concern of the psychologist as such, but it *is* the concern of the psychologist to discover the natural outcome of any policy.

On the other hand, results arrived at in any such preliminary survey must not be pushed beyond their due limits. For

example it is now fairly certain that in England and Scotland, and especially in certain homogeneous social groups in these countries, it is widely held that democratic and despotic societies cannot permanently be brought into friendly relationship. But the present evidence on this matter concerns only social groups which belong to the same general community. Whether, and to what extent, the same opinion is held when different nation groups are concerned, or different societies belonging to diverse nation groups, is so far unknown.

Two other interesting points have emerged each of which deserves further study. In our groups women have shown a greater tendency to predict continuing social concord than men, and the difference is statistically significant.

Further, opinions concerning the bases of concord or disharmony may differ significantly as between subjects who themselves belong to different social groups. For instance, the English and Scottish academic subjects consider differences of social organisation to be a main obstacle to social agreement, but those who belong to practical, wage-earning classes believe that differences of education and intelligence are vastly more important. Clearly opinions about the bases of social agreement are themselves to a large extent socially manufactured. When we have collated our material from more widely separated societies we hope to have more light to throw on this very important matter.

Finally this method does make it possible for the psychologist to study directly the ways in which people think about social problems of a realistic nature. It consists essentially in the construction of concrete social situations, with sufficient detail to ensure that all subjects are being confronted with the same type of problem, and then in asking the subjects to utilise the presented detail in order to push the situations further. By a scrutiny of the results obtained it is possible to discover what parts of the presented detail are producing the greatest effect, and how they are being used to justify the conclusions reached. In view of the fact that practically all current theories of social thinking are of a speculative and dogmatic character, any method which permits a direct study of the determining conditions of such thinking in specific and realistic settings is of extreme importance.

We cannot successfully plan for a world in harmony unless we know all we can about the facts which promote or hinder the friendliness or unfriendliness of differently organised social groups. Here, it seems to me, is a simple and realistic method by which one important group of those facts, those which have to do with popular belief and opinion, can be found rapidly, decisively and their distribution laid bare. It is admittedly a preliminary method. It covers only a part of a wide field. But it is none the less important for that, and it deserves as wide a use and as careful an analysis as it can be given.