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PROFESSOR ROSS'S CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY.¹

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Psychologists will welcome this volume by Professor Ross, who, though not technically of their number, has done brilliant work in establishing sociology upon the results of modern psychology, as his two former books on *Social Control* and *The Foundations of Sociology* abundantly testify. While Professor Ross's book is not the first systematic attempt to deal with the subject of social psychology, as he claims in his preface, since that honor, in English at least, undoubtedly belongs to Professor Baldwin's *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, yet it is a pioneer treatise and as such is extremely interesting and worthy of notice.

In hastily glancing over the book one is struck, first of all, by the fact that it is not laid out on conventional psychological lines. It does not begin with a summary of present knowledge concerning the psychology of the individual, but, after a brief introductory chapter on definitions, it opens with a chapter on suggestibility, followed by chapters on the crowd and mob mind, then by a series of chapters on conventional and customary imitation, and closing with a brief discussion of some aspects of social conflict and public opinion. If one expected that the psychology of human society would include a much wider range of topics than the above, the first impression made by the book would naturally be disappointing; and if one was familiar with the works of Tarde, a further impression would be that Professor Ross has confined himself almost entirely within the lines laid down by

¹*Social Psychology*. An Outline and Source Book. Edward Alsworth Ross, Professor of Sociology in the University of Wisconsin. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908. Pp. xvi + 372. \$1.50 net.

Tarde in his *Les Lois de l'Imitation* and other works. This latter impression is confirmed by the author in the preface where he acknowledges his immeasurable indebtedness to Tarde.

But it is not due to Tarde's influence alone that Professor Ross confines his social psychology largely to a consideration of the phenomena of suggestion and imitation, custom and convention. It is due even more to his conception of the subject. "Social psychology," he tells us,¹ "studies the psychic planes and currents that come into existence among men in consequence of their association. It seeks to understand and account for those uniformities in feeling, belief, or volition which are due to the interaction of human beings." This definition necessarily excludes from social psychology the consideration of social variations and changes as such, social unlikeness and conflict not due to imitation, and as the author himself recognizes,² also those social uniformities due to instinct, innate racial character, and the influence of a common physical environment. On the other hand, since imitation is the chief means of propagating acquired uniformities in human society, as Baldwin has emphasized, Professor Ross is by his definition confined to a consideration of the social effects of the suggestion-imitation process.

The ambiguity in the use of the term 'social psychology,' as used both by psychologists and by sociologists, deserves attention. As has been elsewhere pointed out by the present writer,³ the term is used at present in two entirely distinct senses: first, to mean the psychology of the so-called social states of mind of the individual; secondly, to mean the psychology of the social life (interactions of individuals). Now in the first sense, social psychology is evidently a part of individual psychology, being concerned with a problem of immediate experience. In the second sense, it is equally evident that social psychology is but a name for the psychological aspect of sociology. There is, of course, no objection to using the term in this second sense, provided it is understood that such social psychology has the same problems as sociology, being, in fact, but a section of sociology. It is, indeed, but an application of psychology to the interpretation of the problems of the social life. Fully four fifths of all that is written to-day under the name of sociology is such a psychological interpretation of the social life. Only one densely ignorant, however, would claim that sociology and psychology have the same problems. While the dependence of

¹P. 1.

²Pp. 2, 3.

³*American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XIII., pp. 336, 337.

sociology upon psychology is so great that it is properly classed as a 'mental science,' still it is evident that the sociologist in examining the origin, development, structure, and functions of the forms of the social life (interactions of individuals) is getting at something very different from what the psychologist is getting at. Social psychology in the first sense, then, and social psychology in the second sense are two very different things from the standpoint of scientific methodology.

Now Professor Ross does not use social psychology in the first sense; he says expressly in his *Foundations of Sociology*¹ that he regards social psychology as 'the lower story of sociology.' Yet he denies in the book under review that social psychology is but a name for the psychological aspect of sociology. He says² that social psychology differs from sociology proper in that it does not include the psychology of groups and social structures. The grouping of men through innate or acquired interests, the formation of social institutions to adjust those interests, are not, according to Professor Ross, phenomena to be dealt with by social psychology. "Social psychology considers men only as coming into planes or currents of uniformity, not as uniting into groups." The ground for this extraordinary division of labor between social psychology and 'sociology proper' we discover only when we consult again Ross's *Foundations of Sociology*.³ There we learn that the 'social' is what we get from our social environment through the influence of the example of others. In other words, Professor Ross practically adopts Tarde's views that 'the social is the imitated,' although he emphasizes the importance of 'contrary suggestion,' which Tarde also would probably not object to. A few sentences further on, however, Professor Ross inconsistently defines as 'social' "all phenomena which we cannot explain without bringing in the action of one human being on another." We say this is inconsistent, for the influence of one individual upon another surely cannot be reduced to imitation and contrary suggestion. Can communication, for example, which is preëminently a social phenomenon, be so reduced?

Upon the basis of such reasoning Professor Ross turns aside from the examination of the whole process of inter-stimulation among individuals and its effects upon social groupings, structures, and relations, and confines his attention to the suggestion-imitation process, that is, practically to conventional and customary imitation, as alone subject-matter for social psychology. The working of innate and acquired interests in shaping the groupings of men or in leading to conflicts;

¹ P. 8.

² P. 2.

³ Pp. 6, 7.

the expression of instincts and emotions in the interaction of individuals, often determining their relations; the breaking down of customs and conventions by changes in the life-conditions;—these and similar phenomena he practically ignores.

It seems to the reviewer that, in the long run, there can be but one judgment concerning Professor Ross's conception of social psychology; and that is, that it is wholly arbitrary. Social psychology, as a social science, can only mean an application of psychology to the interpretation of the social life. As such, its field is the whole realm of interstimulations among individuals, all social phenomena, in other words, in so far as they have a psychological aspect, not simply 'uniformities in feeling, belief or volition' due to conventional or customary imitation. It differs from 'sociology proper' only as the psychological aspect of that science differs from the whole.

This notice has been given up almost entirely to a criticism of Professor Ross's conception of social psychology, because that seems to the writer to be the vital point at issue, not only among sociologists, but also between sociologists and psychologists. As regards Professor Ross's handling of the problems with which he deals there is little fault to find, except that his point of view is dominantly non-functional. His standpoint is social habit, rather than social adaptation. This is again practically necessitated by his conception of his subject, which centers attention upon social uniformities rather than upon social changes. One cannot help wishing that Professor Ross had read to as good purpose the leaders in modern functional psychology as he has evidently read Tarde. Then we should have had a very different book. But as it stands, it is still one of the best studies of custom and convention in any language.