

CREATIVE EXPERIENCE

by
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INTRODUCTION

THE social sciences are not gathering all the fruits of certain recent developments of thought; they are not all of them even using the most modern method of study, which is wholly to abandon the region of abstract speculation and to study the behavior of men. Many political scientists talk about conferring power without analyzing power; many economists talk about representation in industry without analyzing representation; there are sociologists who talk about individual and social interests without sufficiently analyzing the difference, if there is one, between individual and social interests. In a book by a recent writer on politics these four words are used in a sentence of three lines: power, purpose, freedom, service. But the author has not told us what these words mean – and we do not know. We can find out only by watching in thousands of cases the working of power, purpose, freedom, only by watching the behavior of men.

The greatest need of today is a keen, analytical, objective study of human relations. We preach “compromise” as the apex of the ethical life, we laud the “balance of power” as our political and international faith, we give our substance and ourselves to establish an “equilibrium” of nations. But compromise sacrifices the integrity of the individual, and balance of power merely rearranges what already exists; it produces no new values. No fairer life for men will ever be the fruit of such doctrine. By adherence to such a creed we bind ourselves to equivalents, we do not seek the plusvalents of experience. If experience is to be progressive, another principle of human association must be found. I know of but one way to seek it. The conceptions of politics, economics and sociology should be studied -while they are still living in the lives of men. We need to study not the “conception” of a general will but concrete joint activity. We should, without disregarding whatever light the past has thrown on these questions, now look at men in their daily occupations at factory or store, at town meeting or congress, and see what we can learn. We should abandon the region of mere statement and counterstatement where so much controversy takes place. We should take our language too from the concrete daily happenings; the words we now use have nearly always ethical connotations which prejudge, which merely in themselves attribute praise or blame to individuals or groups or state.

The biologist, the physiologist and the experimental psychologist are studying "response" in their laboratories. Infant behavior, the behavior of animals both in laboratory and field, the behavior of primitive tribes, have all been carefully observed, but much less study has been given to the relation of adults among civilized peoples. Thousands of students have watched birds building their nests and told us of their "purpose"; the same study has not been given to purpose in human relations and yet it is perhaps the most important conception of social psychology. I suppose we have thought we already understood sufficiently the behavior of men, that we knew how to make the intercourse of men serve the ends of men; yet the Genoa Conference broke up, labor and capital arrive at no peace, the farmers wage bitter war against the middlemen. To be sure, sociology tells us much of the crowd, but the large accomplishments of men are not made in crowd association. As for philosophy, this is not its richest moment: idealism is in disrepute, pragmatism has still bits of intellectualism sticking to it, and realism has not yet found itself. The time is ripe for empirical studies of human relations, social situations.

But we wish to do far more than observe our experience, we wish to make it yield up for us its riches; observation alone may give only negative results, prompt useful guesses, suggest interesting prophecies. Moreover, we must face the fact, if social research is to be made valuable for us, that it is seldom possible to "observe" a social situation as one watches a chemical experiment; the presence of the observer usually changes the situation. We need then those who are frankly participant-observers, those who will try experiment after experiment, and note results, experiments in making human interplay productive — in industry and business, in legislative committees and administrative commissions, in trade unions and shop committees and joint boards of control, in athletic committees and college faculties, in our families, in parliamentary cabinets and international conferences. Brilliant empiricists have poked much pleasant fun at those who tell us of some vague should-be instead of what is. We want something more than either of these; we want to find out what *may* be, the possibilities now open to us. This we can discover only by experiment. Observation is not the only method of science. The methods of physical science are observation and experiment; these should be the methods of the social sciences.

Above all, we should remember that good intentions are not sufficient to solve our problems. Sympathy with labor will not alone solve the labor question; a sympathy with labor that is not founded on understanding often makes matters worse, for any attempt to work out a method of industrial democracy must begin with a frank recognition that the interests involved are

different and must be dealt with as such. It is the ethics of the sentimentalist to say that men's interests are the same; if they were, life would stagnate. Our present experience invalidates all facile prescriptions for superficial reform. We want to know how men can interact and coact better: (1) to secure their ends; (2) to understand and so broaden their ends.

What is the central problem of social relations? It is the question of power; this is the problem of industry, of politics, of international affairs. But our task is not to learn where to place power; it is how to develop power. We frequently hear nowadays of "transferring" power as the panacea for all our ills. Transfer power to occupational groups, we are told, and all will be well; but the transference of power has been the whole course of history—power passing to priests or king or barons, to council or soviet. Are we satisfied to continue this puss-in-the-corner game? We shall certainly do so as long as we think that the transference of power is the way of progress. Genuine power can only be grown, it will slip from every arbitrary hand that grasps it; for genuine power is not coercive control, but coactive control. Coercive power is the curse of the universe; coactive power, the enrichment and advancement of every human soul.

We need a technique of human relations based on the preservation of the integrity of the individual. Of late years we have heard too much of the collective life as an aim in itself. But who cares for "the collective life"? It is usually a mere shibboleth of empty words. What we care about is the *productive* life, and the first test of the productive power of the collective life is its nourishment of the individual. The second test is whether the contributions of individuals can be fruitfully united. Moralists after moralist tells us to give ourselves to the general good, but we need to know far more than this, to do far more than this; our ideal of society is not a kaleidoscope of pretty *bits*.

The nineteenth century talked of the "will" of the people, the "rights" of man. The early twentieth based its hopes for social progress on the doctrine of interests, but long before that doctrine has grown cold, another is emerging. Psychology now gives us "desire" as the key word of our individual life. Students of social relations see desire as the basis of all the actions and interactions of men. It is the word used by Dean Pound in his latest books on law. The pregnant question for the social scientist becomes, then, whether we are to be ruled by the desires of the strongest, whether we are to live in a Power-Society, or whether there is any process possible by which desires may interweave. This is the problem of judge and statesman. The way to rid ourselves of economic determinism is not to deny that it exists; the way to weaken the domination of majorities is not by denunciation.

The object of this book is to suggest that we seek a way by which desires may interweave, that we seek a method by which the full integrity of the individual shall be one with social progress, that we try to make our daily experience yield for us larger and ever larger spiritual values. The confronting of diverse desires, the thereby revealing of "values," the consequent revaluation of values, a uniting of desires which we welcome above all because it means that the next diversity will emerge on a higher social level—this is progress. With many writers "adjustment" has been the controlling principle of the social sciences, but the idea of adjustment has been broadened and developed by the term we have now gained, that of integration. This expression has large implications, some of which are given in this volume. To stick to the word adjustment keeps us enmeshed in the thought which this word once connoted, whereas our thinking has now gone beyond that stage. We do not want capitalism to "adjust" itself to trade unionism; we want something better than either of these. We want the plus values of the conflict. This is still adjustment, if you will, but with a more comprehensive meaning than of old. Or rather, if we used the word adjustment in the social sciences with scientific accuracy, it might still be a good word, but in the social sciences adjustment as the outcome of conflict has too often been used quite loosely, meaning not the method of evolution, but rather reciprocal abandonments based on the idea that by some system of magic subtraction may become a process of addition.

The acceptance of the doctrine of circular or integrative behavior which I have tried to give in this book, lends a new significance to adjustment. This doctrine gives us hints of that "mystery moment" which leads from the existing to the new, shows us a *progressive* experience, the way of individual and social development. Yet it is not from the psychological field alone that our thought is receiving this impetus. The rapprochement of results from widely different fields of research is as striking as it is significant. The psychobiologist and the political scientist, physiologist and philosopher, jurist and psychologist, are reaching certain conclusions which bear a most suggestive resemblance to one another. And these conclusions lead to a conception of creative experience which is perhaps seminal for our future thinking, a conception which is surely destined to influence largely the social sciences.

The pairings made above were not fortuitous ones: Lippmann, a student of politics, quotes Kempf, the psychobiologist; Bok, the Dutch physiologist, hints at a connection between his conclusions and a certain tendency in philosophy; the most progressive juristical thinking has marked kinship with recent psychological thought;¹ Köhler brings to us from his field of work some striking resemblances to the observations of the psychiatrists; the results of

one social worker² are in some respects most interestingly like the conclusions of some of our contemporary psychologists; the same might be said of the ideas worked out in regard to methods by a successful labor manager³ who, from his study of how to deal with the complaints of his workmen,

1 See pp. 268-9.

2 See pp. 105-7.

3 See pp. 79-80.

has discerned principles which are similar to some of the present-day psychological conceptions in regard to relation. In Chapters 111, IV and V, I have written of these conceptions, but as psychology is a domain in which the more general student may easily lose his bearings, I have tried to give some of the implications of recent psychological thought without venturing on difficult technicalities. If, however, an encounter with these has sometimes been unavoidable, and I have not been able to escape all the dangers involved, I hope it will be recognized that I am not writing on psychology, but merely indicating certain correspondences in different fields of thinking which seem to me suggestive. I do not wish to overwork these correspondences or to treat as more than analogy that which is only analogy. We have always to guard against substituting for observation of social relations facile and interesting analogies from psychological studies of the individual. We cannot equip ourselves with the results of research on one level and "apply" them to another. But, interested chiefly in the seeking of a new method, as are most students of the social sciences today, I have taken illustrations of a method which I think vital wherever I could find them; that is, I have used as illustrative material certain parallels (although not wishing to force their standing as parallels) which seem to me to indicate a new attitude towards method. The social sciences are in some respects in the state of the physical sciences before Newton. The great contribution of Newton to the physical sciences was his showing of the relation of quantitative analysis to qualitative analysis. This must be worked out for the social sciences where we have not always understood the relation between quantitative and qualitative analysis.

I should like to add, since my position in regard to some of the matters touched on in this volume might otherwise be misunderstood, that I have often referred to the results of psychological research in discussing social phenomena when my inclination would sometimes have been to refer to

philosophical discussion of the points involved. I have done this partly because the experimental verification which psychology is bringing to certain philosophical conceptions seems to me very valuable, and also because since what is called social psychology is coming to have more and more standing as a subject of study, it has seemed to me useful to bring together present psychological and social data as far as I could in regard to the one idea in this book. In addition to this I have thought that the correlation of the results of entirely independent observation in different fields might be interesting, that we might get an appreciation of the full import of certain conceptions in one field of study by a cognizance of their value in other fields, that the cross-fertilizations, so to speak, which are now going on in our thinking are worthy of recognition.

I have, therefore, because I have entered other fields of study than my own in writing this book, more acknowledgments to make than is usual. So many people have given me most generously of their time, either to discuss particular problems or to read and criticize manuscript, that their names would make too long a list to print here, yet my sense of indebtedness for the many suggestions they have given me is none the less great,

From Professor Sheffield, however, I have had a kind of help which should receive special mention, for Mr. Sheffield has conceived his own particular subject of study, that of discussion,⁴ so broadly, the technique he is working out is so valuable for all students of social conflict, that my talks with him have been most helpful to me. He has also read the whole of my manuscript and made many suggestions and additions.

4 See Alfred Dvvight Sheffield, *Joining in Discussion*.

With Professor E. C. Lindeman my work has been still more closely connected. For two years Mr. Lindeman has engaged in a study of marketing cooperatives, not only for the purpose of investigating an aspect of the cooperative movement but also in order to observe an acute form of social conflict, that between farmers and middlemen. Mr. Lindeman and I shared the hope that from this investigation certain conclusions might be drawn which would be valuable for social conflict in general, and also that there might be developed some fruitful methods of social research in line with the general advance in sociological thinking. In recognition of much that was common in our aims, we decided that it would be advantageous to maintain a rather close working connection, and we have therefore had conferences from time to time from which I have learned much. Moreover, Mr. Lindeman has very kindly allowed me to use his material as freely as I wished, material which

shows great discernment and which recognizes the difference between the dramatic moments and those more subtle and intangible workings that often reveal the real values of a situation. I have used certain illustrations which he has given me and others which I have gained from going over a large amount of printed matter (cooperative news organs, propagandist pamphlets, contract forms, contested cases, etc.) which he has sent me. Mr. Lindeman's own forthcoming book, *Social Discovery, An Approach to the Study of Functional Groups*, seems to me a valuable contribution toward that new technique of social research which is so badly needed today.

To Mr. Herbert Croly I owe deep gratitude for the interest he has shown in my work, and for his generous encouragement which has not only stimulated my efforts but helped to give direction to them. To his books, *Progressive Democracy* and *The Promise of American Life*, my thinking is much indebted, for they greatly enlarged my vision and opened for me entirely new vistas of the possibilities of the development of democracy, of the meaning of citizenship.

It is impossible to express what I owe to my friend, Miss Isobel L. Briggs, for her untiring help, day by day, in considering with me difficult points both of thought and presentation, in preparing manuscript and in reading proof.