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Psychological Observations

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Translated by Rudolf Dircks

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Psychological Observations.

Every animal, and especially man, requires, in order to exist and get on in the world, a certain fitness and proportion between his will and his intellect. The more exact and true this fitness and proportion are by nature, the easier, safer, and pleasanter it will be for him to get through the world. At the same time, a mere approximation to this exact point will protect him from destruction. There is, in consequence, a certain scope within the limits of exactness and fitness of this so-called proportion. The normal proportion is as follows. As the object of the intellect is to be the light and guide of the will on its path, the more violent, impetuous, and passionate the inner force of the will, the more perfect and clear must be the intellect which belongs to it; so that the ardent efforts of the will, the glow of passion, the vehemence of affection, may not lead a man astray or drive him to do things that he has not given his consideration or are wrong or will ruin him; which will infallibly be the case when a very strong will is combined with a very weak intellect. On the other hand, a phlegmatic character, that is to say, a weak and feeble will, can agree and get on with little intellect; a moderate will only requires a moderate intellect. In general, any disproportion between the will and intellect — that is to say, any deviation from the normal proportion referred to — tends to make a man unhappy; and the same thing happens when the disproportion is reversed. The development of the intellect to an abnormal degree of strength and superiority, thereby making it out of all proportion to the will, a condition which constitutes the essence of true genius, is not only superfluous but actually an impediment to the needs and purposes of life. This means that, in youth, excessive energy in grasping the objective world, accompanied by a lively imagination and little experience, makes the mind susceptible to exaggerated ideas and a prey even to chimeras; and this results in an eccentric and even fantastic character. And when, later, this condition of mind no longer exists and succumbs to the teaching of experience, the genius will never feel so much at home or take up his position in the everyday world or in civic life, and move with the ease of a man of normal intellect; indeed, he is often more apt to make curious mistakes. For the ordinary mind is so perfectly at home in the narrow circle of its own ideas and way of grasping things that no one can control it in that circle; its capacities always remain true to their original purpose, namely, to look after the service of the will; therefore it applies itself unceasingly to this end without ever going beyond it. While the genius, as I have stated, is at bottom a *monstrum per excessum*; just as conversely the passionate, violent, and unintelligent man, the brainless savage, is a *monstrum per dejectum*.

The will to live, which forms the innermost kernel of every living being, is most distinctly apparent in the highest, that is to say in the cleverest, order of animals, and therefore in them we may see and consider the nature of the will most clearly. For below this order of animals the will is not so prominent, and has a less degree of objectivation; but above the higher order of animals, I mean in men, we get reason, and with reason reflection, and with this the faculty for dissimulation, which immediately throws a veil over the actions of

the will. But in outbursts of affection and passion the will exhibits itself unveiled. This is precisely why passion, when it speaks, always carries conviction, whatever the passion may be; and rightly so. For the same reason, the passions are the principal theme of poets and the stalking-horse of actors. And it is because the will is most striking in the lower class of animals that we may account for our delight in dogs, apes, cats, etc.; it is the absolute naïveté of all their expressions which charms us so much.

What a peculiar pleasure it affords us to see any free animal looking after its own welfare unhindered, finding its food, or taking care of its young, or associating with others of its kind, and so on! This is exactly what ought to be and can be. Be it only a bird, I can look at it for some time with a feeling of pleasure; nay, a water-rat or a frog, and with still greater pleasure a hedgehog, a weazel, a roe, or a deer. The contemplation of animals delights us so much, principally because we see in them our own existence very much simplified.

There is only one mendacious creature in the world — man. Every other is true and genuine, for it shows itself as it is, and expresses itself just as it feels. An emblematical or allegorical expression of this fundamental difference is to be found in the fact that all animals go about in their natural state; this largely accounts for the happy impression they make on us when we look at them; and as far as I myself am concerned, my heart always goes out to them, particularly if they are free animals. Man, on the other hand, by his silly dress becomes a monster; his very appearance is objectionable, enhanced by the unnatural paleness of his complexion — the nauseating effect of his eating meat, of his drinking alcohol, his smoking, dissoluteness, and ailments. He stands out as a blot on Nature. And it was because the Greeks were conscious of this that they restricted themselves as far as possible in the matter of dress.

Much that is attributed to force of habit ought rather to be put down to the constancy and immutability of original, innate character, whereby we always do the same thing under the same circumstances; which happens the first as for the hundredth time in consequence of the same necessity. While force of habit, in reality, is solely due to indolence seeking to save the intellect and will the work, difficulty, and danger of making a fresh choice; so that we are made to do to-day what we did yesterday and have done a hundred times before, and of which we know that it will gain its end.

But the truth of the matter lies deeper; for it can be explained more clearly than appears at first sight. The power of inertia applied to bodies which may be moved by mechanical means only, becomes force of habit when applied to bodies which are moved by motives. The actions which we do out of sheer force of habit occur, as a matter of fact, without any individual separate motive exercised for the particular case; hence we do not really think of them. It was only when each action at first took place that it had a motive; after that it became a habit; the secondary after-effect of this motive is the present habit, which is sufficient to carry on the action; just as a body, set in motion by a push, does not need another push in order to enable it to continue its motion; it will continue in motion for ever if it is not obstructed in any way. The same thing applies to animals; training is a habit which is forced upon them. The horse draws a cart along contentedly without being urged to do so; this motion is still the effect of those lashes with the whip which incited him at first, but which by the law of inertia have become perpetuated as habit. There is really

something more in all this than a mere parable; it is the identity of the thing in question, that is to say of the will, at very different degrees of its objectivation, by which the same law of motion takes such different forms.

Viva muchos años! is the ordinary greeting in Spain, and it is usual throughout the whole world to wish people a long life. It is not a knowledge of what life is that explains the origin of such a wish, but rather knowledge of what man is in his real nature: namely, the will to live.

The wish which every one has, that he may be remembered after his death, and which those people with aspirations have for posthumous fame, seems to me to arise from this tenacity to life. When they see themselves cut off from every possibility of real existence they struggle after a life which is still within their reach, even if it is only an ideal — that is to say, an unreal one.

We wish, more or less, to get to the end of everything we are interested in or occupied with; we are impatient to get to the end of it, and glad when it is finished. It is only the general end, the end of all ends, that we wish, as a rule, as far off as possible.

Every separation gives a foretaste of death, and every meeting a foretaste of the resurrection. This explains why even people who were indifferent to each other, rejoice so much when they meet again after the lapse of twenty or thirty years.

The deep sorrow we feel on the death of a friend springs from the feeling that in every individual there is a something which we cannot define, which is his alone and therefore irreparable. *Omne individuum ineffabile*. The same applies to individual animals. A man who has by accident fatally wounded a favourite animal feels the most acute sorrow, and the animal's dying look causes him infinite pain.

It is possible for us to grieve over the death of our enemies and adversaries, even after the lapse of a long time, almost as much as over the death of our friends — that is to say, if we miss them as witnesses of our brilliant success.

That the sudden announcement of some good fortune may easily have a fatal effect on us is due to the fact that our happiness and unhappiness depend upon the relation of our demands to what we get; accordingly, the good things we possess, or are quite sure of possessing, are not felt to be such, because the nature of all enjoyment is really only negative, and has only the effect of annulling pain; whilst, on the other hand, the nature of pain or evil is really positive and felt immediately. With the possession, or the certain prospect of it, our demands instantly rise and increase our desire for further possession and greater prospects. But if the mind is depressed by continual misfortune, and the claims reduced to a minimum, good fortune that comes suddenly finds no capacity for its acceptance. Neutralised by no previous claims, it now has apparently a positive effect, and accordingly its whole power is exercised; hence it may disorganise the mind — that is to say, be fatal to it. This is why, as is well known, one is so careful to get a man first to hope for happiness before announcing it, then to suggest the prospect of it, then little by little make it known, until gradually all is known to him; every portion of the revelation loses the strength of its effect because it is anticipated by a demand, and room is still left for more. In virtue of all this, it might be said that our stomach for good fortune is bottomless, but the entrance to it is narrow. What has been said does not apply to sudden misfortunes

in the same way. Since hope always resists them, they are for this reason rarely fatal. That fear does not perform an analogous office in cases of good fortune is due to the fact that we are instinctively more inclined to hope than to fear; just as our eyes turn of themselves to light in preference to darkness.

Hope is to confuse the desire that something should occur with the probability that it will. Perhaps no man is free from this folly of the heart, which deranges the intellect's correct estimation of probability to such a degree as to make him think the event quite possible, even if the chances are only a thousand to one. And still, an unexpected misfortune is like a speedy death-stroke; while a hope that is always frustrated, and yet springs into life again, is like death by slow torture.

He who has given up hope has also given up fear; this is the meaning of the expression desperate. It is natural for a man to have faith in what he wishes, and to have faith in it because he wishes it. If this peculiarity of his nature, which is both beneficial and comforting, is eradicated by repeated hard blows of fate, and he is brought to a converse condition, when he believes that something must happen because he does not wish it, and what he wishes can never happen just because he wishes it; this is, in reality, the state which has been called desperation.

That we are so often mistaken in others is not always precisely due to our faulty judgment, but springs, as a rule as Bacon says, from *intellectus luminis sicci non est, sed recipit infusionem a voluntate et affectibus*: for without knowing it, we are influenced for or against them by trifles from the very beginning. It also often lies in the fact that we do not adhere to the qualities which we really discover in them, but conclude from these that there are others which we consider inseparable from, or at any rate incompatible with, them. For instance, when we discern generosity, we conclude there is honesty; from lying we conclude there is deception; from deception, stealing, and so on; and this opens the door to many errors, partly because of the peculiarity of human nature, and partly because of the one-sidedness of our point of view. It is true that character is always consistent and connected; but the roots of all its qualities lies too deep to enable one to decide from special data in a given case which qualities can, and which cannot exist together.

The use of the word person in every European language to signify a human individual is unintentionally appropriate; *persona* really means a player's mask, and it is quite certain that no one shows himself as he is, but that each wears a mask and plays a rôle. In general, the whole of social life is a continual comedy, which the worthy find insipid, whilst the stupid delight in it greatly.

It often happens that we blurt out things that may in some kind of way be harmful to us, but we are silent about things that may make us look ridiculous; because in this case effect follows very quickly on cause.

The ordinary man who has suffered injustice burns with a desire for revenge; and it has often been said that revenge is sweet. This is confirmed by the many sacrifices made merely for the sake of enjoying revenge, without any intention of making good the injury that one has suffered. The centaur Nessus utilised his last moments in devising an extremely clever revenge, and the fact that it was certain to be effective sweetened an otherwise bitter death. The same idea, presented in a more modern and plausible way,

occurs in Bertolotti's novel, *Le due Sorelle* which has been translated into three languages. Walter Scott expresses mankind's proneness to revenge in words as powerful as they are true: "Vengeance is the sweetest morsel to the mouth that ever was cooked in hell!" I shall now attempt a psychological explanation of revenge. All the suffering that nature, chance, or fate have assigned to us does not, *ceteris paribus*, pain us so much as suffering which is brought upon us by the arbitrary will of another. This is due to the fact that we regard nature and fate as the original rulers of the world; we look upon what befalls us, through them, as something that might have befallen every one else. Therefore in a case of suffering which arises from this source, we bemoan the fate of mankind in general more than we do our own. On the other hand, suffering inflicted on us through the arbitrary will of another is a peculiarly bitter addition to the pain or injury caused, as it involves the consciousness of another's superiority, whether it be in strength or cunning, as opposed to our own weakness. If compensation is possible, it wipes out the injury; but that bitter addition, "I must submit to that from you," which often hurts more than the injury itself, is only to be neutralised by vengeance. For by injuring the man who has injured us, whether it be by force or cunning, we show our superiority, and thereby annul the proof of his. This gives that satisfaction to the mind for which it has been thirsting. Accordingly, where there is much pride or vanity there will be a great desire for revenge. But as the fulfilment of every wish proves to be more or less a delusion, so is also the wish for revenge. The expected enjoyment is mostly embittered by pity; nay, gratified revenge will often lacerate the heart and torment the mind, for the motive which prompts the feeling of it is no longer active, and what is left is the testimony of our wickedness.

The pain of an ungratified desire is small compared with that of repentance; for the former has to face the immeasurable, open future; the latter the past, which is closed irrevocably.

Money is human happiness in abstracto; so that a man who is no longer capable of enjoying it in concrete gives up his whole heart to it.

Moroseness and melancholy are very opposite in nature; and melancholy is more nearly related to happiness than to moroseness. Melancholy attracts; moroseness repels. Hypochondria not only makes us unreasonably cross and angry over things concerning the present; not only fills us with groundless fears of imaginative mishaps for the future; but also causes us to unjustly reproach ourselves concerning our actions in the past.

Hypochondria causes a man to be always searching for and racking his brain about things that either irritate or torment him. The cause of it is an internal morbid depression, combined often with an inward restlessness which is temperamental; when both are developed to their utmost, suicide is the result.

What makes a man hard-hearted is this, that each man has, or fancies he has, sufficient in his own troubles to bear. This is why people placed in happier circumstances than they have been used to are sympathetic and charitable. But people who have always been placed in happy circumstances are often the reverse; they have become so estranged to suffering that they have no longer any sympathy with it; and hence it happens that the poor sometimes show themselves more benevolent than the rich.

On the other hand, what makes a man so very curious, as may be seen in the way he will spy into other people's affairs, is boredom, a condition which is diametrically opposed to

suffering; — though envy also often helps in creating curiosity.

At times, it seems as though we wish for something, and at the same time do not wish for it, so that we are at once both pleased and troubled about it. For instance, if we have to undergo some decisive test in some affair or other, in which to come off victorious is of great importance to us; we both wish that the time to be tested were here, and yet dread the idea of its coming. If it happens that the time, for once in a way, is postponed, we are both pleased and sorry, for although the postponement was unexpected, it, however, gives us momentary relief. We have the same kind of feeling when we expect an important letter containing some decision of moment, and it fails to come.

In cases like these we are really controlled by two different motives; the stronger but more remote being the desire to stand the test, and to have the decision given in our favour; the weaker, which is closer at hand, the desire to be left in peace and undisturbed for the present, and consequently in further enjoyment of the advantage that hoping on in uncertainty has over what might possibly be an unhappy issue. Consequently, in this case the same happens to our moral vision as to our physical, when a smaller object near at hand conceals from view a bigger object some distance away.

The course and affairs of our individual life, in view of their true meaning and connection, are like a piece of crude work in mosaic. So long as one stands close in front of it, one cannot correctly see the objects presented, or perceive their importance and beauty; it is only by standing some distance away that both come into view. And in the same way one often understands the true connection of important events in one's own life, not while they are happening, or even immediately after they have happened, but only a long time afterwards.

Is this so, because we require the magnifying power of imagination, or because a general view can only be got by looking from a distance? or because one's emotions would otherwise carry one away? or because it is only the school of experience that ripens our judgment? Perhaps all these combined. But it is certain that it is only after many years that we see the actions of others, and sometimes even our own, in their true light. And as it is in one's own life, so it is in history.

Why is it, in spite of all the mirrors in existence, no man really knows what he looks like, and, therefore, cannot picture in his mind his own person as he pictures that of an acquaintance? This is a difficulty which is thwarted at the very outset by *gnothi sauton* — know thyself.

This is undoubtedly partly due to the fact that a man can only see himself in the glass by looking straight towards it and remaining quite still; whereby the play of the eye, which is so important, and the real characteristic of the face is, to a great extent, lost. But co-operating with this physical impossibility, there appears to be an ethical impossibility analogous to it. A man cannot regard the reflection of his own face in the glass as if it were the face of some one else — which is the condition of his seeing himself objectively. This objective view rests with a profound feeling on the egoist's part, as a moral being, that what he is looking at is not himself; which is requisite for his perceiving all his defects as they really are from a purely objective point of view; and not until, then can he see his face reflected as it really and truly is. Instead of that, when a man sees his own

person in the glass the egoistic side of him always whispers, It is not somebody else, but I myself, which has the effect of a *noli me tangere*, and prevents his taking a purely objective view. Without the leaven of a grain of malice, it does not seem possible to look at oneself objectively.

No one knows what capacities he possesses for suffering and doing until an opportunity occurs to bring them into play; any more than he imagines when looking into a perfectly smooth pond with a mirror-like surface, that it can tumble and toss and rush from rock to rock, or leap as high into the air as a fountain; — any more than in ice-cold water he suspects latent warmth.

That line of Ovid's,

“*Pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram,*”

is only applicable in its true physical sense to animals; but in a figurative and spiritual sense, unfortunately, to the great majority of men too. Their thoughts and aspirations are entirely devoted to physical enjoyment and physical welfare, or to various personal interests which receive their importance from their relation to the former; but they have no interests beyond these. This is not only shown in their way of living and speaking, but also in their look, the expression of their physiognomy, their gait and gesticulations; everything about them proclaims in *terram prona!* Consequently it is not to them, but only to those nobler and more highly endowed natures, those men who really think and observe things round them, and are the exceptions in the human race, that the following lines are applicable:

“*Os homini sublime dedit coelumque tueri*

Jussit et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus.”

Why is “common“ an expression of contempt? And why are “uncommon,” “extraordinary,” “distinguished,” expressions of approbation? Why is everything that is common contemptible?

Common, in its original sense, means that which is peculiar and common to the whole species, that is to say that which is innate in the species. Accordingly, a man who has no more qualities than those of the human species in general is a “common man“ “Ordinary man” is a much milder expression, and is used more in reference to what is intellectual, while common is used more in a moral sense.

What value can a being have that is nothing more than like millions of its kind? Millions? Nay, an infinitude, an endless number of beings, which Nature in *secula seculorum* unceasingly sends bubbling forth from her inexhaustible source; as generous with them as the smith with the dross that flies round his anvil.

So it is evidently only right that a being which has no other qualities than those of the species, should make no claim to any other existence than that confined to and conditioned by the species.

I have already several times explained(1) that whilst animals have only the generic character, it falls to man's share alone to have an individual character. Nevertheless, in most men there is in reality very little individual character; and they may be almost all

classified. Ce sont des espèces. Their desires and thoughts, like their faces, are those of the whole species — at any rate, those of the class of men to which they belong, and they are therefore of a trivial, common nature, and exist in thousands. Moreover, as a rule one can tell pretty exactly beforehand what they will say and do. They have no individual stamp: they are like manufactured goods. If, then, their nature is absorbed in that of the species, must not their existence be too? The curse of vulgarity reduces man to the level of animals, for his nature and existence are merged in that of the species only. It is taken for granted that anything that is high, great, or noble by its very nature stands isolated in a world where no better expression can be found to signify what is base and paltry than the term which I have mentioned as being generally used — namely, common.

According as our intellectual energy is strained or relaxed will life appear to us either so short, petty, and fleeting, that nothing can happen of sufficient importance to affect our feelings; nothing is of any importance to us — be it pleasure, riches, or even fame, and however much we may have failed, we cannot have lost much; or vice versâ, life will appear so long, so important, so all in all, so grave, and so difficult that we throw ourselves into it with our whole soul, so that we may get a share of its possessions, make ourselves sure of its prizes, and carry out our plans. The latter is the immanent view of life; it is what Gracian means by his expression, *tomar muy de veras el vivir* (life is to be taken seriously); while for the former, the transcendental view, Ovid's *non est tanti* is a good expression; Plato's a still better, [Greek: *oute ti ton anthroponon axion hesti, megalaes spoudaes*] (*nihil, in rebus humanis, magno studio dignum est*).

The former state of mind is the result of the intellect having gained ascendancy over consciousness, where, freed from the mere service of the will, it grasps the phenomena of life objectively, and so cannot fail to see clearly the emptiness and futility of it. On the other hand, it is the will that rules in the other condition of mind, and it is only there to lighten the way to the object of its desires. A man is great or small according to the predominance of one or the other of these views of life.

It is quite certain that many a man owes his life's happiness solely to the circumstance that he possesses a pleasant smile, and so wins the hearts of others. However, these hearts would do better to take care to remember what Hamlet put down in his tablets — that one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.

People of great and brilliant capacities think little of admitting or exposing their faults and weaknesses. They regard them as something for which they have paid, and even are of the opinion that these weaknesses, instead of being a disgrace to them, do them honour. This is especially the case when they are errors that are inseparable from their brilliant capacities — *conditiones sine quibus non*, or, as George Sand expressed it, *chacun a les défauts de ses vertus*.

On the contrary, there are people of good character and irreproachable minds, who, rather than admit their few little weaknesses, carefully conceal them, and are very sensitive if any reference is made to them; and this just because their whole merit consists in the absence of errors and defects; and hence when these errors come to light they are immediately held in less esteem.

Modesty, in people of moderate ability, is merely honesty, but in people of great talent it is

hypocrisy. Hence it is just as becoming in the latter to openly admit the regard they have for themselves, and not to conceal the fact that they are conscious of possessing exceptional capabilities, as it is in the former to be modest. Valerius Maximus gives some very good examples of this in his chapter *de fiducia sui*.

Man even surpasses all the lower order of animals in his capacity for being trained. Mohammedans are trained to pray five times a day with their faces turned towards Mecca; and they do it regularly. Christians are trained to make the sign of the Cross on certain occasions, and to bow, and so forth; so that religion on the whole is a real masterpiece of training — that is to say, it trains people what they are to think; and the training, as is well known, cannot begin too early. There is no absurdity, however palpable it may be, which may not be fixed in the minds of all men, if it is inculcated before they are six years old by continual and earnest repetition. For it is the same with men as with animals, to train them with perfect success one must begin when they are very young.

Noblemen are trained to regard nothing more sacred than their word of honour, to believe earnestly, rigidly, and firmly in the inane code of knight-errantry, and if necessary to seal their belief by death, and to look upon a king as a being of a higher order. Politeness and compliments, and particularly our courteous attitude towards ladies, are the result of training; and so is our esteem for birth, position, and title. And so is our displeasure at certain expressions directed against us, our displeasure being proportionate to the expression used. The Englishman has been trained to consider his being called no gentleman a crime worthy of death — a liar, a still greater crime; and so, the Frenchman, if he is called a coward; a German, if he is called a stupid. Many people are trained to be honest in some particular direction, whilst in everything else they exhibit very little honesty; so that many a man will not steal money, but he will steal everything that will afford him enjoyment in an indirect way. Many a shopkeeper will deceive without scruple, but he will on no condition whatever steal.

The doctor sees mankind in all its weakness; the lawyer in all its wickedness; the theologian in all its stupidity.

Opinion obeys the same law as the swing of the pendulum: if it goes beyond the centre of gravity on one side, it must go as far beyond on the other. It is only after a time that it finds the true point of rest and remains stationary.

Distance in space decreases the size of things, for it contracts them and so makes their defects and deficiencies disappear. This is why everything looks so much finer in a contracting mirror or in a camera obscura than it is in reality; and the past is affected in the same way in the course of time. The scenes and events that happened long ago, as well as the persons who took part in them, become a delight to the memory, which ignores everything that is immaterial and disagreeable. The present possesses no such advantage; it always seems to be defective. And in space, small objects near at hand appear to be big, and if they are very near, they cover the whole of our field of vision; but as soon as we stand some little distance away they become minute and finally invisible. And so it is with time: the little affairs and misfortunes of everyday life excite in us emotion, anxiety, vexation, passion, for so long as they are quite near us, they appear big, important, and considerable; but as soon as the inexhaustible stream of time has carried them into the distance they become unimportant; they are not worth remembering and are soon

forgotten, because their importance merely consisted in being near.

It is only now and then that a man learns something; but he forgets the whole day long.

Our memory is like a sieve, that with time and use holds less and less; in so far, namely, as the older we get, the quicker anything we have entrusted to our memory slips through it, while anything that was fixed firmly in it, when we were young, remains. This is why an old man's recollections are the clearer the further they go back, and the less clear the nearer they approach the present; so that his memory, like his eyes, becomes long-sighted ([Greek: presbus]).

That sometimes, and apparently without any reason, long-forgotten scenes suddenly come into the memory, is, in many cases, due to the recurrence of a scarcely perceptible odour, of which we were conscious when those scenes actually took place; for it is well known that odours more easily than anything else awaken memories, and that, in general, something of an extremely trifling nature is all that is necessary to call up a nexus idearum.

And by the way, I may say that the sense of sight has to do with the understanding,(2) the sense of hearing with reason,(3) and the sense of smell with memory, as we see in the present case. Touch and taste are something real, and dependent on contact; they have no ideal side.

Memory has also this peculiarity attached to it, that a slight state of intoxication very often enhances the remembrance of past times and scenes, whereby all the circumstances connected with them are recalled more distinctly than they could be in a state of sobriety; on the other hand, the recollection of what one said or did while in a state of intoxication is less clear than usual, nay, one does not recollect at all if one has been very drunk. Therefore, intoxication enhances one's recollection of the past, while, on the other hand, one remembers little of the present, while in that state.

That arithmetic is the basest of all mental activities is proved by the fact that it is the only one that can be accomplished by means of a machine. Take, for instance, the reckoning machines that are so commonly used in England at the present time, and solely for the sake of convenience. But all analysis finitorum et infinitorum is fundamentally based on calculation. Therefore we may gauge the "profound sense of the mathematician," of whom Lichtenberg has made fun, in that he says: "These so-called professors of mathematics have taken advantage of the ingenuousness of other people, have attained the credit of possessing profound sense, which strongly resembles the theologians' profound sense of their own holiness."

As a rule, people of very great capacities will get on better with a man of extremely limited intelligence than with a man of ordinary intelligence; and it is for the same reason that the despot and the plebeians, the grandparents and the grandchildren, are natural allies.

I am not surprised that people are bored when they are alone; they cannot laugh when they are alone, for such a thing seems foolish to them. Is laughter, then, to be regarded as merely a signal for others, a mere sign, like a word? It is a want of imagination and dulness of mind generally ([Greek: anaistaesia kai bradytaes psychaes]), as Theophrastus puts it, that prevents people from laughing when they are alone. The lower animals neither

laugh when they are alone nor in company.

Nyson, the misanthropist, was surprised as he was laughing to himself by one of these people, who asked him why he laughed when he was alone. "That is just why I was laughing," was the answer.

People who do not go to the theatre are like those who make their toilet without a looking-glass; — but it is still worse to come to a decision without seeking the advice of a friend. For a man may have the most correct and excellent judgment in everything else but in his own affairs; because here the will at once deranges the intellect. Therefore a man should seek counsel. A doctor can cure every one but himself; this is why he calls in a colleague when he is ill.

The natural gesticulation of everyday life, such as accompanies any kind of lively conversation, is a language of its own, and, moreover, is much more universal than the language of words; so far as it is independent of words, and the same in all nations; although each nation makes use of gesticulation in proportion to its vivacity, and in individual nations, the Italian, for instance, it is supplemented by some few gesticulations which are merely conventional, and have therefore only local value.

Its universal use is analogous to logic and grammar, since it expresses the form and not the matter of conversation. However, it is to be distinguished from them since it has not only an intellectual relation but also a moral — that is, it defines the movements of the will. And so it accompanies conversation, just as a correctly progressive bass accompanies a melody, and serves in the same way to enhance the effect. The most interesting fact about gesticulation is that as soon as conversation assumes the same form there is a repetition of the same gesture. This is the case, however varied the matter, that is to say, the subject-matter, may be. So that I am able to understand quite well the general nature of a conversation — in other words, the mere form and type of it, while looking out of a window — without hearing a word spoken. It is unmistakably evident that the speaker is arguing, advancing his reasons, then modifying them, then urging them, and drawing his conclusion in triumph; or it may be he is relating some wrong that he has suffered, plainly depicting in strong and condemnatory language the stupidity and stubbornness of his opponents; or he is speaking of the splendid plan he has thought out and put in execution, explaining how it became a success, or perhaps failed because fate was unfavourable; or perhaps he is confessing that he was powerless to act in the matter in question; or recounting that he noticed and saw through, in good time, the evil schemes that had been organised against him, and by asserting his rights or using force frustrated them and punished their author; and a hundred other things of a similar kind. But what gesticulation alone really conveys to me is the essential matter — be it of a moral or intellectual nature — of the whole conversation in abstracto. That is to say the quintessence, the true substance of the conversation, remains identical whatever has brought about the conversation, and consequently whatever the subject-matter of it may be.

The most interesting and amusing part of the matter, as has been said, is the complete identity of the gestures for denoting the same kind of circumstances, even if they are used by most diverse people; just as the words of a language are alike for every one and liable to such modifications as are brought about by a slight difference in accent or education. And yet these standing forms of gesticulation which are universally observed are certainly

the outcome of no convention; they are natural and original, a true language of nature, which may have been strengthened by imitation and custom. It is incumbent on an actor, as is well known, and on a public speaker, to a less extent, to make a careful study of gesture — a study which must principally consist in the observation and imitation of others, for the matter cannot very well be based on abstract rules; with the exception of some quite general leading principles — as, for instance, that the gesture must not follow the word, but rather immediately precede it, in order to announce it and thereby rouse attention.

The English have a peculiar contempt for gesticulation, and regard it as something undignified and common; this seems to me to be only one of those silly prejudices of English fastidiousness. For it is a language which nature has given to every one and which every one understands; therefore to abolish and forbid it for no other reason than to gratify that so much extolled, gentlemanly feeling, is a very dubious thing to do.

The state of human happiness, for the most part, is like certain groups of trees, which seen from a distance look wonderfully fine; but if we go up to them and among them, their beauty disappears; we do not know wherein it lay, for it is only trees that surround us. And so it happens that we often envy the position of others.

Notes

- (1) Grundpr. der Ethik, p. 48; Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, vol. i. p. 338.
- (2) Vierfache Wurzel, § 21.
- (3) Pererga, vol. ii. § 311.