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Psychological Observations

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Psychological Observations.

For every animal, and more especially for man, a certain conformity and proportion between the will and the intellect is necessary for existing or making any progress in the world. The more precise and correct the proportion which nature establishes, the more easy, safe and agreeable will be the passage through the world. Still, if the right point is only approximately reached, it will be enough to ward off destruction. There are, then, certain limits within which the said proportion may vary, and yet preserve a correct standard of conformity. The normal standard is as follows. The object of the intellect is to light and lead the will on its path, and therefore, the greater the force, impetus and passion, which spurs on the will from within, the more complete and luminous must be the intellect which is attached to it, that the vehement strife of the will, the glow of passion, and the intensity of the emotions, may not lead man astray, or urge him on to ill considered, false or ruinous action; this will, inevitably, be the result, if the will is very violent and the intellect very weak. On the other hand, a phlegmatic character, a weak and languid will, can get on and hold its own with a small amount of intellect; what is naturally moderate needs only moderate support. The general tendency of a want of proportion between the will and the intellect, in other words, of any variation from the normal proportion I have mentioned, is to produce unhappiness, whether it be that the will is greater than the intellect, or the intellect greater than the will. Especially is this the case when the intellect is developed to an abnormal degree of strength and superiority, so as to be out of all proportion to the will, a condition which is the essence of real genius; the intellect is then not only more than enough for the needs and aims of life, it is absolutely prejudicial to them. The result is that, in youth, excessive energy in grasping the objective world, accompanied by a vivid imagination and a total lack of experience, makes the mind susceptible, and an easy prey to extravagant ideas, nay, even to chimeras; and the result is an eccentric and phantastic character. And when, in later years, this state of mind yields and passes away under the teaching of experience, still the genius never feels himself at home in the common world of every day and the ordinary business of life; he will never take his place in it, and accommodate himself to it as accurately as the person of moral intellect; he will be much more likely to make curious mistakes. For the ordinary mind feels itself so completely at home in the narrow circle of its ideas and views of the world that no one can get the better of it in that sphere; its faculties remain true to their original purpose, viz., to promote the service of the will; it devotes itself steadfastly to this end, and abjures extravagant aims. The genius, on the other hand, is at bottom a monstrum per excessum; just as, conversely, the passionate, violent and unintelligent man, the brainless barbarian, is a monstrum per defectum.

The will to live, which forms the inmost core of every living being, exhibits itself most conspicuously in the higher order of animals, that is, the cleverer ones; and so in them the nature of the will may be seen and examined most clearly. For in the lower orders its activity is not so evident; it has a lower degree of objectivation; whereas, in the class

which stands above the higher order of animals, that is, in men, reason enters in; and with reason comes discretion, and with discretion, the capacity of dissimulation, which throws a veil over the operations of the will. And in mankind, consequently, the will appears without its mask only in the affections and the passions. And this is the reason why passion, when it speaks, always wins credence, no matter what the passion may be; and rightly so. For the same reason the passions are the main theme of poets and the stalking horse of actors. The conspicuousness of the will in the lower order of animals explains the delight we take in dogs, apes, cats, etc.; it is the entirely naive way in which they express themselves that gives us so much pleasure.

The sight of any free animal going about its business undisturbed, seeking its food, or looking after its young, or mixing in the company of its kind, all the time being exactly what it ought to be and can be — what a strange pleasure it gives us! Even if it is only a bird, I can watch it for a long time with delight; or a water rat or a hedgehog; or better still, a weasel, a deer, or a stag. The main reason why we take so much pleasure in looking at animals is that we like to see our own nature in such a simplified form. There is only one mendacious being in the world, and that is man. Every other is true and sincere, and makes no attempt to conceal what it is, expressing its feelings just as they are.

Many things are put down to the force of habit which are rather to be attributed to the constancy and immutability of original, innate character, according to which under like circumstances we always do the same thing: whether it happens for the first or the hundredth time, it is in virtue of the same necessity. Real force of habit, as a matter of fact, rests upon that indolent, passive disposition which seeks to relieve the intellect and the will of a fresh choice, and so makes us do what we did yesterday and have done a hundred times before, and of which we know that it will attain its object. But the truth of the matter lies deeper, and a more precise explanation of it can be given than appears at first sight. Bodies which may be moved by mechanical means only are subject to the power of inertia; and applied to bodies which may be acted on by motives, this power becomes the force of habit. The actions which we perform by mere habit come about, in fact, without any individual separate motive brought into play for the particular case: hence, in performing them, we really do not think about them. A motive was present only on the first few occasions on which the action happened, which has since become a habit: the secondary after-effect of this motive is the present habit, and it is sufficient to enable the action to continue: just as when a body had been set in motion by a push, it requires no more pushing in order to continue its motion; it will go on to all eternity, if it meets with no friction. It is the same in the case of animals: training is a habit which is forced upon them. The horse goes on drawing his cart quite contentedly, without having to be urged on: the motion is the continued effect of those strokes of the whip, which urged him on at first: by the law of inertia they have become perpetuated as habit. All this is really more than a mere parable: it is the underlying identity of the will at very different degrees of its objectivation, in virtue of which the same law of motion takes such different forms.

Vive muchos años is the ordinary greeting in Spain, and all over the earth it is quite customary to wish people a long life. It is presumably not a knowledge of life which directs such a wish; it is rather knowledge of what man is in his inmost nature, the will to live.

The wish which everyone has that he may be remembered after his death — a wish which rises to the longing for posthumous glory in the case of those whose aims are high — seems to me to spring from this clinging to life. When the time comes which cuts a man off from every possibility of real existence, he strives after a life which is still attainable, even though it be a shadowy and ideal one.

The deep grief we feel at the loss of a friend arises from the feeling that in every individual there is something which no words can express, something which is peculiarly his own and therefore irreparable. *Omne individuum ineffabile.*

We may come to look upon the death of our enemies and adversaries, even long after it has occurred, with just as much regret as we feel for that of our friends, viz., when we miss them as witnesses of our brilliant success.

That the sudden announcement of a very happy event may easily prove fatal rests upon the fact that happiness and misery depend merely on the proportion which our claims bear to what we get. Accordingly, the good things we possess, or are certain of getting, are not felt to be such; because all pleasure is in fact of a negative nature and effects the relief of pain, while pain or evil is what is really positive; it is the object of immediate sensation. With the possession or certain expectation of good things our demands rise, and increase our capacity for further possession and larger expectations. But if we are depressed by continual misfortune, and our claims reduced to a minimum, the sudden advent of happiness finds no capacity for enjoying it. Neutralized by an absence of pre-existing claims, its effects are apparently positive, and so its whole force is brought into play; hence it may possibly break our feelings, i.e., be fatal to them. And so, as is well known, one must be careful in announcing great happiness. First, one must get the person to hope for it, then open up the prospect of it, then communicate part of it, and at last make it fully known. Every portion of the good news loses its efficacy, because it is anticipated by a demand, and room is left for an increase in it. In view of all this, it may be said that our stomach for good fortune is bottomless, but the entrance to it is narrow. These remarks are not applicable to great misfortunes in the same way. They are more seldom fatal, because hope always sets itself against them. That an analogous part is not played by fear in the case of happiness results from the fact that we are instinctively more inclined to hope than to fear; just as our eyes turn of themselves towards light rather than darkness.

Hope is the result of confusing the desire that something should take place with the probability that it will. Perhaps no man is free from this folly of the heart, which deranges the intellect's correct appreciation of probability to such an extent that, if the chances are a thousand to one against it, yet the event is thought a likely one. Still in spite of this, a sudden misfortune is like a death stroke, whilst a hope that is always disappointed and still never dies, is like death by prolonged torture.

He who has lost all hope has also lost all fear; this is the meaning of the expression "desperate." It is natural to a man to believe what he wishes to be true, and to believe it because he wishes it, If this characteristic of our nature, at once beneficial and assuaging, is rooted out by many hard blows of fate, and a man comes, conversely, to a condition in which he believes a thing must happen because he does not wish it, and what he wishes to happen can never be, just because he wishes it, this is in reality the state described as "desperation."

That we are so often deceived in others is not because our judgment is at fault, but because in general, as Bacon says, *intellectus luminis sicci non est, sed recipit infusionem a voluntate et affectibus*: that is to say, trifles unconsciously bias us for or against a person from the very beginning. It may also be explained by our not abiding by the qualities which we really discover; we go on to conclude the presence of others which we think inseparable from them, or the absence of those which we consider incompatible. For instance, when we perceive generosity, we infer justice; from piety, we infer honesty; from lying, deception; from deception, stealing, etc.; a procedure which opens the door to many false views, partly because human nature is so strange, partly because our standpoint is so one-sided. It is true, indeed, that character always forms a consistent and connected whole; but the roots of all its qualities lie too deep to allow of our concluding from particular data in a given case whether certain qualities can or cannot exist together.

We often happen to say things that may in some way or other be prejudicial to us; but we keep silent about things that might make us look ridiculous; because in this case effect follows very quickly on cause.

The pain of an unfulfilled wish is small in comparison with that of repentance; for the one stands in the presence of the vast open future, whilst the other has the irrevocable past closed behind it.

Geduld, patientia, patience, especially the Spanish *sufrimiento*, is strongly connected with the notion of suffering. It is therefore a passive state, just as the opposite is an active state of the mind, with which, when great, patience is incompatible. It is the innate virtue of a phlegmatic, indolent, and spiritless people, as also of women. But that it is nevertheless so very useful and necessary is a sign that the world is very badly constituted.

Money is human happiness in the abstract: he, then, who is no longer capable of enjoying human happiness in the concrete, devotes his heart entirely to money.

Obstinacy is the result of the will forcing itself into the place of the intellect.

If you want to find out your real opinion of anyone, observe the impression made upon you by the first sight of a letter from him.

The course of our individual life and the events in it, as far as their true meaning and connection is concerned, may be compared to a piece of rough mosaic. So long as you stand close in front of it, you cannot get a right view of the objects presented, nor perceive their significance or beauty. Both come in sight only when you stand a little way off. And in the same way you often understand the true connection of important events in your life, not while they are going on, nor soon after they are past, but only a considerable time afterwards.

Is this so, because we require the magnifying effect of imagination? or because we can get a general view only from a distance? or because the school of experience makes our judgment ripe? Perhaps all of these together: but it is certain that we often view in the right light the actions of others, and occasionally even our own, only after the lapse of years. And as it is in one's own life, so it is in history.

Happy circumstances in life are like certain groups of trees. Seen from a distance they look very well: but go up to them and amongst them, and the beauty vanishes; you don't

know where it can be; it is only trees you see. And so it is that we often envy the lot of others.

The doctor sees all the weakness of mankind, the lawyer all the wickedness, the theologian all the stupidity.

A person of phlegmatic disposition who is a blockhead, would, with a sanguine nature, be a fool.

Now and then one learns something, but one forgets the whole day long.

Moreover our memory is like a sieve, the holes of which in time get larger and larger: the older we get, the quicker anything entrusted to it slips from the memory, whereas, what was fixed fast in it in early days is there still. The memory of an old man gets clearer and clearer, the further it goes back, and less clear the nearer it approaches the present time; so that his memory, like his eyes, becomes short-sighted.

In the process of learning you may be apprehensive about bewildering and confusing the memory, but not about overloading it, in the strict sense of the word. The faculty for remembering is not diminished in proportion to what one has learnt, just as little as the number of moulds in which you cast sand, lessens its capacity for being cast in new moulds. In this sense the memory is bottomless. And yet the greater and more various any one's knowledge, the longer he takes to find out anything that may suddenly be asked him; because he is like a shopkeeper who has to get the article wanted from a large and multifarious store; or, more strictly speaking, because out of many possible trains of thought he has to recall exactly that one which, as a result of previous training, leads to the matter in question. For the memory is not a repository of things you wish to preserve, but a mere dexterity of the intellectual powers; hence the mind always contains its sum of knowledge only potentially, never actually.

It sometimes happens that my memory will not reproduce some word in a foreign language, or a name, or some artistic expression, although I know it very well. After I have bothered myself in vain about it for a longer or a shorter time, I give up thinking about it altogether. An hour or two afterwards, in rare cases even later still, sometimes only after four or five weeks, the word I was trying to recall occurs to me while I am thinking of something else, as suddenly as if some one had whispered it to me. After noticing this phenomenon with wonder for very many years, I have come to think that the probable explanation of it is as follows. After the troublesome and unsuccessful search, my will retains its craving to know the word, and so sets a watch for it in the intellect. Later on, in the course and play of thought, some word by chance occurs having the same initial letters or some other resemblance to the word which is sought; then the sentinel springs forward and supplies what is wanting to make up the word, seizes it, and suddenly brings it up in triumph, without my knowing where and how he got it; so it seems as if some one had whispered it to me. It is the same process as that adopted by a teacher towards a child who cannot repeat a word; the teacher just suggests the first letter of the word, or even the second too; then the child remembers it. In default of this process, you can end by going methodically through all the letters of the alphabet.

In the ordinary man, injustice rouses a passionate desire for vengeance; and it has often been said that vengeance is sweet. How many sacrifices have been made just to enjoy the

feeling of vengeance, without any intention of causing an amount of injury equivalent to what one has suffered. The bitter death of the centaur Nessus was sweetened by the certainty that he had used his last moments to work out an extremely clever vengeance. Walter Scott expresses the same human inclination in language as true as it is strong: "Vengeance is the sweetest morsel to the mouth that ever was cooked in hell!" I shall now attempt a psychological explanation of it.

Suffering which falls to our lot in the course of nature, or by chance, or fate, does not, *ceteris paribus*, seem so painful as suffering which is inflicted on us by the arbitrary will of another. This is because we look upon nature and chance as the fundamental masters of the world; we see that the blow we received from them might just as well have fallen on another. In the case of suffering which springs from this source, we bewail the common lot of humanity rather than our own misfortune. But that it is the arbitrary will of another which inflicts the suffering, is a peculiarly bitter addition to the pain or injury it causes, viz., the consciousness that some one else is superior to us, whether by force or cunning, while we lie helpless. If amends are possible, amends heal the injury; but that bitter addition, "and it was you who did that to me," which is often more painful than the injury itself, is only to be neutralized by vengeance. By inflicting injury on the one who has injured us, whether we do it by force or cunning, is to show our superiority to him, and to annul the proof of his superiority to us. That gives our hearts the satisfaction towards which it yearns. So where there is a great deal of pride and vanity, there also will there be a great desire of vengeance. But as the fulfillment of every wish brings with it more or less of a sense of disappointment, so it is with vengeance. The delight we hope to get from it is mostly embittered by compassion. Vengeance taken will often tear the heart and torment the conscience: the motive to it is no longer active, and what remains is the evidence of our malice.