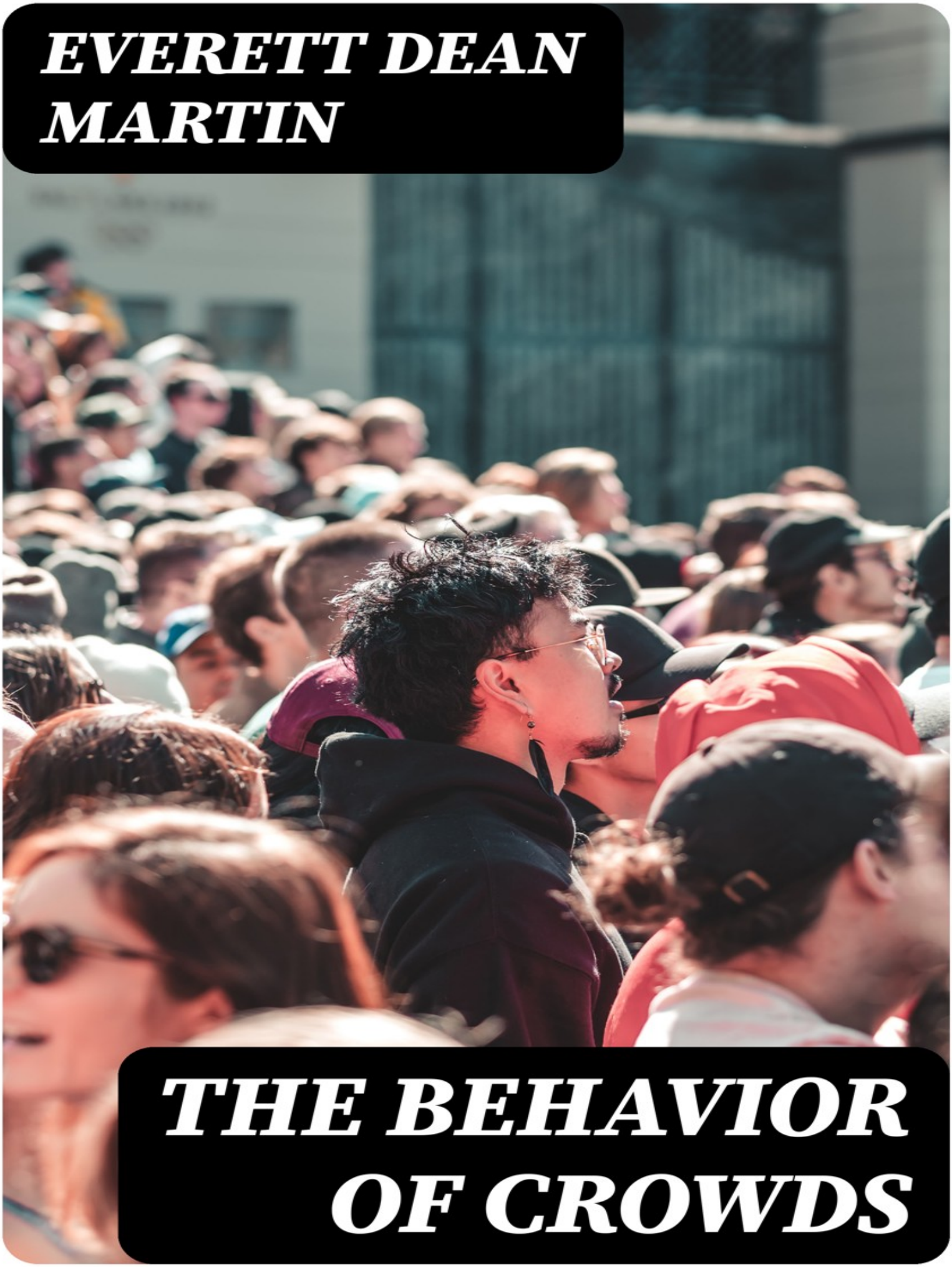
EVERETT DEAN MARTIN
THE BEHAVIOR OF CROWDS

Everett Dean Martin

The Behavior of Crowds

EAN 8596547387053

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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Foreword

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Since the publication of Le Bons book, *The Crowd*, little has been added to our knowledge of the mechanisms of crowd-behavior. As a practical problem, the habit of crowd-making is daily becoming a more serious menace to civilization. Events are making it more and more clear that, pressing as are certain economic questions, the forces which threaten society are really psychological.

Interest in the economic struggle has to a large extent diverted attention from the significance of the problems of social psychology. Social psychology is still a rather embryonic science, and this notwithstanding the fact that psychiatry has recently provided us with a method with which we may penetrate more deeply than ever before into the inner sources of motive and conduct.

The remedy which I have suggested in Chapter X deserves a much more extended treatment than I have given it. It involves one of the great mooted questions of modern philosophical discussion. It is, however, not within the province of this book to enter upon a discussion of the philosophy of Humanism. The subject has been thoroughly thrashed over in philosophical journals and in the writings of James, Schiller, Dewey, and others. It is sufficient for my purpose merely to point out the fact that the humanist way of thinking may provide us with just that educational method which will break up the logical forms in which the crowd-mind intrenches itself.

Those who expect to find a prescribed formula or ideal scheme of organization as a remedy for our social ills may feel that the solution to which I have come—namely, a new educational method—is too vague. But the problem of the crowd is really concerned with the things of the mind. And if

I am correct in my thesis that there is a necessary connection between crowd-thinking and the various traditional systems of intellectualist, absolutist, and rationalist philosophy, the way out must be through the formation of some such habits of thinking as I have suggested.

E. D. M.

New York, *October 10, 1919*.

I.
The Crowd and the Social Problem of To-day

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Every one at times feels himself in the grip of social forces over which he has no control. The apparently impersonal nature of these forces has given rise to various mechanistic theories of social behavior. There are those who interpret the events of history as by-products of economic evolution. Others, more idealistic but determinists, nevertheless, see in the record of human events the working out of a preordained plan.

There is a popular notion, often shared by scholars, that the individual and society are essentially irreconcilable principles. The individual is assumed to be by nature an antisocial being. Society, on the other hand, is opposed in principle to all that is personal and private. The demands of society, its welfare and aims, are treated as if they were a tax imposed upon each and every one by something foreign to the natural will or even the happiness of all. It is as if society as "thing-in-itself" could prosper in opposition to the individuals who collectively constitute it.

It is needless to say that both the individual and the social, according to such a view, are empty abstractions. The individual is, in fact, a social entity. Strip him of his social interests, endowments, and habits, and the very feeling of self, or "social me" as William James called it, vanishes and nothing is left but a Platonic idea and a reflex arc. The social also is nothing else than the manner in which individuals habitually react to one another. Society in the abstract, as a principle opposed to individual existence, has no more reality than that of the grin which Alice in

Wonderland sees after the famous Cheshire cat has vanished. It is the mere logical concept of others in general, left leering at us after all the concrete others have been thought away.

Much social thinking is of this cat-grin sort. Having abstracted from the thought of self everything that is social, and from the idea of the social all that has to do with concrete persons, the task remains to get pure grin and pure cat together again in such a way that neither shall lose its identity in the other. It is, of course, impossible to reconcile these mutually exclusive abstractions either in theory or in practice. It is often difficult enough, even with the aid of empirical thinking, to adjust our relations with the other people about us. But on the Cheshire-cat hypothesis, the social problem can never be solved, because it is not a real problem at all.

Since the individual is therefore a social being as such, and the social is just a way of acting together, the social problem does not grow out of a conflict between the self and an impersonal social principle. The conflicts are, in fact, clashes among certain individuals and groups of them, or else—and this is a subject to which social psychology has paid insufficient attention—the social struggle is in certain of its phases a conflict within the personal psyche itself. Suppose that the apparently impersonal element in social behavior is not impersonal in fact, but is, for the most part, the result of an impersonal manner of thinking about ourselves. Every psychic fact must really be an act of somebody. There are no ideas without thinkers to think them, no impersonal thoughts or disembodied impulses, no "independent" truths, no transcendental principles existing in themselves and outside of human heads. Life is everywhere reaction; it is nowhere a mere product or a passive registering of impersonal forces. It is the organisms behavior in the presence of what we call environment.

Individual opinions cannot be tossed into a common hat, like small coins. Though we may each learn from the others, there is no magic by which our several thoughts can sum themselves up into a common fund of public opinion or super-personal whole which thinks itself, there being no collective head to think it. No matter how many people think and behave as I do, each of us knows only his own thought and behavior. My thought may be about you and what I judge you are thinking, but it is not the same as your thought. To each the social is *nil* except in so far as he experiences it himself, and to each it is something unique when viewed from within. The uniformity and illusion of identity—in short, the impersonal aspect of social thinking and activity appears only when we try to view social behavior from without—that is, as objectively manifest in the behavior of others.

What then is the secret of this impersonal view of the social? Why do we think of ourselves socially in the same impersonal or external way that we think of others? There is an interesting parallel here in the behavior of certain types of mental pathology. There are neurotics who commonly feel that certain aspects of their behavior are really not of their own authorship, but come to them as the result of influences acting from without. It was such phenomena in part that led psychologists of a generation ago to construct the theory of "multiple personality." It is known now that the psychic material which in these cases appears to be automatic, and impersonal, in the sense that it is not consciously willed, is really motivated by unconscious mechanisms. The apparently "impersonal" behavior of the neurotic is psychologically determined, though unconsciously.

May there not be a like unconscious psychic determination of much that is called social behavior? It is my thesis that this is so, and that there are certain types of social behavior which are characterized by unconscious

motivation to such a degree that they may be placed in a definite class of psychological phenomena. This group of phenomena I have, following to some extent the terminology of Le Bon, called "The Crowd." I wish there were a more exact word, for it is very difficult to use the word crowd in its psychological sense without causing some confusion in the mind of the reader. In ordinary speech "a crowd" is any gathering of people. In the writings of Le Bon, as we shall see, the word has a special meaning, denoting not a gathering of people as such, but a gathering which behaves in a certain way which may be classified and described psychologically as "crowd mentality." Not every gathering of people shows this crowd-mentality. It is a characteristic which appears under certain circumstances. In this discussion the word "crowd" must be understood to mean the peculiar mental condition which sometimes occurs when people think and act together, either immediately where the members of the group are present and in close contact, or remotely, as when they affect one another in a certain way through the medium of an organization, a party or sect, the press, etc.

The crowd while it is a social phenomenon differs greatly from the social as such. People may be social—the family is an example of this—without being a crowd either in thought or action. Again a crowd—a mob is an example of this—may be distinctly antisocial, if we attach any ethical meaning to the term. Both the individual and society suffer, as we shall see, from crowd-behavior. I know of nothing which to-day so menaces not only the values of civilization, but also—it is the same thing in other words, perhaps—the achievement of personality and true knowledge of self, as the growing habit of behaving as crowds.

Our society is becoming a veritable babel of gibbering crowds. Not only are mob outbreaks and riots increasing in number, but every interest, patriotic, religious, ethical, political, economic, easily degenerates into a confusion of

propagandist tongues, into extravagant partisanship, and intemperance. Whatever be the ideal to which we would attain, we find the path of self-culture too slow; we must become army worms, eating our way to the goal by sheer force of numbers. The councils of democracy are conducted on about the psychological level of commercial advertising and with about the same degree of sincerity. While it cannot be said that the habit of crowd-making is peculiar to our times—other ages, too, have indulged in it—it does seem that the tendency to crowd-mindedness has greatly increased in recent years.

Whether it is temperance, or justice, or greater freedom, moral excellence or national glory, that we desire—whether we happen to be conservatives or radicals, reformers or liberals, we must become a cult, write our philosophy of life in flaming headlines, and sell our cause in the market. No matter if we meanwhile surrender every value for which we stand, we must strive to cajole the majority into imagining itself on our side. For only with the majority with us, whoever we are, can we live. It is numbers, not values, that count—quantity not quality. Everybody must "moral-crusade," "agitate," "press-agent," play politics. Everyone is forced to speak as the crowd, think as the crowd, understand as the crowd. The tendency is to smother all that is unique, rare, delicate, secret. If you are to get anywhere in this progressive age you must be vulgar, you must add to your vulgarity unction. You must take sides upon dilemmas which are but half true, change the tempo of your music to ragtime, eat your spiritual food with a knife, drape yourself in the flag of the dominant party. In other words, you must be "one hundred per cent" crowd man.

The effect of all this upon the individual is that he is permitted neither to know nor to belong to himself. He becomes a mere banner toter. He must hold himself ever in readiness to wiggle-waggle in the perpetual Simon-says-thumbs-up game which his crowd is playing. He spends his

days playing a part which others have written for him; loses much of his genuineness and courage, and pampers himself with imitation virtues and second-hand truths.

Upon the social peace the effect is equally bad. Unnecessary and meaningless strife is engendered. An idolatry of phrases is enthroned. A silly game of bullying and deception is carried on among contending crowds, national, religious, moral, social. The great truths of patriotism, morality, and religion become hardly more than caricatures —mere instruments of crowds for putting their rivals on the defensive, and securing obeisance from the members of the crowd itself, easily repudiated in the hour of the crowds victory. The social harmony is menaced by numerous cliques and parties, ranging in size all the way from the nation-crowd down to the smallest sect, each setting out like a band of buccaneers bent upon nothing but its own dominance, and seeking to justify its piratical conduct by time-worn platitudes.

That which is meant by the cry of the Russian Revolution, "All power to the soviets," is peculiar neither to Russia nor to the working class. Such in spirit is the cry of every crowd, for every crowd is, psychologically considered, a soviet. The industrial and political danger of the soviet would amount to little or nothing, were it not for the fact that the modern world is already *spiritually sovietized*. The threatened soviet republic is hardly more than the practical result of a hundred years of crowd-thinking on almost every subject. Whether capitalist or proletarian, reformer or liberal, we have all along been behaving and thinking in soviet fashion. In almost every important matter in life we have ignored Emersons warning that we must rely upon ourselves, and have permitted ourselves to behave and think as crowds, fastening their labels and dogmas upon our spirits and taking their shibboleths upon our tongues, thinking more of the temporary triumph of our particular sect or party than of the effect of our behavior upon ourselves and others.

There is certainly nothing new in the discovery that our social behavior is not what it ought to be. Mediæval thinkers were as much aware of the fact as we are, but they dismissed the social problem with the simple declaration of the "sinfulness of human nature." Nineteenth-century utilitarians felt that the social problem could be solved by more enlightened and more reasonable behavior on the part of individuals. Recent social psychology—of which the writings of Prof. William McDougall are probably the best example, has abandoned the theory that social behavior is primarily governed by reason or by considerations of utility. A better explanation of social phenomena is found in instinct. It is held that the true motives of social behavior are pugnacity, the instinct of self-appreciation or self-debasement, of sex, gregariousness, and the like. Each instinct with its "affective emotion" becomes organized through various complex reactions to the social environment, into fairly well established "sentiments." These sentiments are held to be the controlling social forces. As McDougall says:

> We may say then that directly or indirectly the instincts are the prime movers of all human activity; by the conative or impulsive force of some instinct (or of some habit derived from an instinct), every train of thought, however cold and passionless it may seem, is borne along toward its end, and every bodily activity is initiated and sustained. The instinctive impulses determine the ends of all activities and supply the driving-power by which all mental activities are sustained; and all the complex intellectual apparatus of the most highly developed mind is but a means toward those ends, is but the instrument by which these impulses seek their satisfactions.... These impulses are the mental forces that maintain and shape all the life of

individuals and societies, and in them we are confronted with the central mystery of life and mind and will.

This is all very good so far as it goes. But I confess that I am somewhat at loss to know just what it explains so far as crowd-behavior is concerned. Do these instincts and sentiments operate the same under all social conditions? Are some of them suppressed by society and forced to seek their satisfaction in roundabout ways? If so, how? Moreover, I fail to find in present-day social psychology, any more than in the writings of Herbert Spencer, Sumner, Ward, and others, any clear distinction between the characteristic behavior of crowds and other forms of social activity. Only the school of Le Bon has shown any definite appreciation of these facts. It is to Le Bon, therefore, in spite of the many and just criticisms of his work, that we must turn for a discussion of the crowd as a problem apart from social psychology in general. Le Bon saw that the mind of the crowd demanded special psychological study, but many of the psychological principles which he used in solving the problem were inadequate to the task. Certain of his conclusions were, therefore, erroneous. Since the close of the nineteenth century, however, psychology has gained much insight into the secret springs of human activity. Possibly the most significant achievement in the history of this science is Freuds work in analytical psychology.

So much light has been thrown upon the unconscious by Freud and other analytical psychologists, that psychology in all its branches is beginning to take some of Freuds discoveries into account. Strictly speaking, psychoanalysis is a therapeutic method. It has, however, greatly enriched our knowledge of mental pathology, and thus much of its data has become indispensable to general psychology and to social psychology in particular.

In his book the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud has shown that there exist in the wish-fulfilling mechanisms of

dream formation certain definite laws. These laws undoubtedly underlie and determine also many of our crowd-ideas, creeds, conventions, and social ideals. In his book, *Totem and Taboo*, Freud has himself led the way to the application of the analytical psychology to the customs and ideas of primitive groups. I am sure that we shall find, as we proceed, that with the analytical method we shall gain an entirely new insight into the causes and meaning of the behavior of crowds.

II.
How Crowds are Formed

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In his well-known work on the psychology of the crowd Le Bon noted the fact that the unconscious plays a large part in determining the behavior of crowds. But he is not clear in his use of the term "unconscious." In fact, as Graham Wallas justly points out, his terminology is very loose indeed. Le Bon seems to have made little or no attempt to discover in detail the processes of this unconscious. In company with most psychologists of his time, he based his explanation upon the theory of "suggestion and imitation." He saw in the unconscious merely a sort of mystical "common humanity," from which he derived his—also mystical—idea of a common crowd-mind which each individual in the crowd in some unexplained manner shared. He says:

> The most striking peculiarity presented by a psychological crowd is the following: Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation....
>
> It is easy to prove how much the individual forming part of a crowd differs from the isolated individual, but it is less easy to discover the causes of this difference.
>
> To obtain, at any rate, a glimpse of them it is necessary in the first place to call to mind the truth established by modern psychology, that unconscious

> phenomena play an altogether preponderating part, not only in organic life, but also in the operations of intelligence.... Our conscious acts are the outcome of an unconscious substratum created in the mind in the main by heredity. This substratum consists of innumerable characteristics handed down from generation to generation which constitute the genius of the race....
>
> It is more especially with respect to those unconscious elements which constitute the genius of a race that all the individuals belonging to it resemble each other.... It is precisely these general qualities of character, governed by forces of which we are unconscious and possessed by the majority of normal individuals of a race in much the same degree—it is precisely these qualities, I say, that in crowds become common property. In the collective mind the intellectual aptitudes of the individuals, and in consequence their individuality, are weakened. The heterogeneous is swamped in the homogeneous and the unconscious qualities obtain the upper hand.

It may safely be said, I think, that this assumed impersonal collective mind of the crowd has no existence in a sound psychology. Peoples minds show, of course, innumerable mutual influences, but they do not fuse and run together. They are in many respects very similar, but similarity is not identity, even when people are crowded together. Our author has doubtless borrowed here rather uncritically from Herbert Spencers organic conception of society—his later statement, not quoted here, that the alleged merging of the heterogeneous in the homogeneous would logically imply a regression to a lower stage in evolution, is another bit of Spencerian jargon commonly accepted in Le Bons day.

When, however, Graham Wallas, in *The Great Society*, states that Le Bon is not "himself clear whether he means

that crowds have no collective consciousness, or that every individual in a crowd is completely unconscious," it seems to me that Wallas is a little unfair. Neither Le Bon nor the relation of the unconscious to the crowd-mind may be dismissed in Wallass apparently easy manner. Le Bon has established two points which I think cannot be successfully denied: first, that the crowd is essentially a psychological phenomenon, people behaving differently in a crowd from the way they behave when isolated; and second, that the unconscious has something to do with crowd-thinking and acting.

Wallas says of Le Bon:

> Tarde and Le Bon were Frenchmen brought up on vivid descriptions of the Revolution and themselves apprehensive of the spread of socialism. Political movements which were in large part carried out by men conscious and thoughtful, though necessarily ill informed, seemed therefore to them as they watched them from the outside to be due to the blind and unconscious impulses of masses "incapable both of reflection and of reasoning."

There is some truth in this criticism. In spite of the attempt of the famous author of crowd-psychology to give us a really scientific explanation of crowd-phenomena, his obviously conservative bias robs his work of much of its power to convince. We find here, just as in the case of Gobineau, Nietzsche, Faguet, Conway, and other supporters of the aristocratic idea, an a priori principle of distrust of the common people as such. In many passages Le Bon does not sufficiently distinguish between the crowd and the masses. Class and mass are opposed to each other as though, due to their superior reasoning powers, the classes were somehow free from the danger of behaving as crowd. This is of course not true. Any class may behave and think as a crowd—in

fact it usually does so in so far as its class interests are concerned. Anyone who makes a study of the public mind in America to-day will find that the phenomena of the crowd-mind are not at all confined to movements within the working class or so-called common people.

It has long been the habit of conservative writers to identify the crowd with the proletariat and then to feel that the psychology of the situation could be summed up in the statement that the crowd was simply the creature of passion and blind emotion. The psychology which lies back of such a view—if it is psychology rather than class prejudice—is the old intellectualism which sought to isolate the intellect from the emotional nature and make the true mental life primarily a knowledge affair. The crowd, therefore, since it was regarded as an affair of the emotions, was held to be one among many instances of the natural mental inferiority of the common people, and a proof of their general unfitness for self-government.

I do not believe that this emotional theory is the true explanation of crowd-behavior. It cannot be denied that people in a crowd become strangely excited. But it is not only in crowds that people show emotion. Feeling, instinct, impulse, are the dynamic of all mental life. The crowd doubtless inhibits as many emotions as it releases. Fear is conspicuously absent in battle, pity in a lynching mob. Crowds are notoriously anæsthetic toward the finer values of art, music, and poetry. It may even be argued that the feelings of the crowd are dulled, since it is only the exaggerated, the obvious, the cheaply sentimental, which easily moves it.

There was a time when insanity was also regarded as excessive emotion. The insane man was one who raved, he was mad. The word "crazy" still suggests the condition of being "out of ones mind"—that is, driven by irrational emotion. Psychiatry would accept no such explanation to-day. Types of insanity are distinguished, not with respect to

the mere amount of emotional excitement they display, but in accordance with the patients whole psychic functioning. The analyst looks for some mechanism of controlling ideas and their relation to impulses which are operating in the unconscious. So with our understanding of the crowd-mind. Le Bon is correct in maintaining that the crowd is not a mere aggregation of people. *It is a state of mind.* A peculiar psychic change must happen to a group of people before they become a crowd. And as this change is not merely a release of emotion, neither is it the creation of a collective mind by means of imitation and suggestion. My thesis is that *the crowd-mind is a phenomenon which should best be classed with dreams, delusions, and the various forms of automatic behavior*. The controlling ideas of the crowd are the result neither of reflection nor of "suggestion," but are akin to what, as we shall see later, the psychoanalysts term "complexes." The crowd-self—if I may speak of it in this way—is analogous in many respects to "compulsion neurosis," "somnambulism," or "paranoiac episode." Crowd ideas are "fixations"; they are always symbolic; they are always related to something repressed in the unconscious. They are what Doctor Adler would call "fictitious guiding lines."

There is a sense in which all our thinking consists of symbol and fiction. The laws, measurements, and formulas of science are all as it were "shorthand devices"—instruments for relating ourselves to reality, rather than copies of the real. The "truth" of these working ideas is demonstrated in the satisfactoriness of the results to which they lead us. If by means of them we arrive at desired and desirable adaptations to and within our environment, we say they are verified. If, however, no such verification is reached, or the result reached flatly contradicts our hypothesis, the sane thinker holds his conclusions in abeyance, revises his theories, or candidly gives them up and clings to the real as empirically known.

Suppose now that a certain hypothesis, or "fiction," instead of being an instrument for dealing with external reality, is unconsciously designed as a refuge from the real. Suppose it is a symbolic compromise among conflicting desires in the individuals unconscious of which he cannot rid himself. Suppose it is a disguised expression of motives which the individual as a civilized being cannot admit to his own consciousness. Suppose it is a fiction necessary to keep up ones ego consciousness or self-appreciative feeling without which either he or his world would instantly become valueless. In these latter cases the fiction is not and cannot be, without outside help, modified by the reality of experience. The complex of ideas becomes a closed system, a world in and of itself. Conflicting facts of experience are discounted and denied by all the cunning of an insatiable, unconscious will. The fiction then gets itself substituted for the true facts of experience; the individual has "lost the function of the real." He no longer admits its disturbing elements as correctives. He has become mentally unadjusted—pathological.

Most healthy people doubtless would on analysis reveal themselves as nourishing fictions of this sort, more or less innocent in their effects. It is possible that it is by means of such things that the values of living are maintained for us all. But with the healthy these fictions either hover about the periphery of our known world as shadowy and elusive inhabitants of the inaccessible, or else they are socially acceptable as religious convention, race pride, ethical values, personal ambition, class honor, etc. The fact that so much of the ground of our valuations, at least so far as these affect our self-appreciation, is explicable by psychologists as "pathological" in origin need not startle us. William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, you will remember, took the ground that in judging of matters of this kind, it is not so much by their origins—even admitting the pathological as a cause—but by their fruits that we shall

know them. There are "fictions" which are neither innocent nor socially acceptable in their effects on life and character. Many of our crowd-phenomena belong, like paranoia, to this last class.

As I shall try to show later, the common confusion of the crowd with "society" is an error. The crowd is a social phenomenon only in the sense that it affects a number of persons at the same time. As I have indicated, people may be highly social without becoming a crowd. They may meet, mingle, associate in all sorts of ways, and organize and co-operate for the sake of common ends—in fact, the greater part of our social life might normally have nothing in common with crowd-behavior. Crowd-behavior is pseudo-social—if social organizations be regarded as a means to the achievement of realizable goods. The phenomena which we call the crowd-mind, instead of being the outgrowth of the directly social, are social only in the sense that all mental life has social significance; they are rather the result of forces hidden in the personal and unconscious psyche of the members of the crowd, forces which are merely *released* by social gatherings of a certain sort.

Let us notice what happens in a public meeting as it develops into a crowd, and see if we can trace some of the steps of the process. Picture a large meeting-hall, fairly well filled with people. Notice first of all what sort of interest it is which as a rule will most easily bring an assemblage of people together. It need not necessarily be a matter of great importance, but it must be something which catches and challenges attention without great effort. It is most commonly, therefore, an *issue* of some sort. I have seen efforts made in New York to hold mass meetings to discuss affairs of the very greatest importance, and I have noted the fact that such efforts usually fail to get out more than a handful of specially interested persons, no matter how well advertised, if the subject to be considered happens not to be of a controversial nature. I call especial attention to this