

*The Nature  
of  
Rhythms*

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with a new introduction by

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FELLOW-FEELING

Thus everything that tends to promote an absolutely collective existence (a limiting concept) will tend to make the individual more of a hero, and at the same time more of a clod, in that it stultifies him as a spiritual personality with an ideal and vision of his own.

On the other hand, all consideration of things in the light of his own material interest (i.e. self-love, individual self-respect, and the tendencies to self-preservation and betterment which derive from this), will also have to be purged from his outlook, if he is to immerse himself in the primordial feelings and attitudes of the group. He is simultaneously raised above his physical circumstances and despoiled of his spiritual inheritance. (Is there not an analogy here with passionate love—*l'amour-passion* as Stendhal calls it—as distinct from self-gratifying lust on the one hand, and spiritual acceptance of the loved one as an individual on the other?)

If there is any one thing within recent experience which serves to confirm these observations, it is the experience of the (First) World War. However it comes about, and whoever is to blame for it, a war-situation transforms all 'organic communities', i.e. groups and individuals having a sense of unity in their collective mode of life, into real entities of a unitary and powerful kind. It glorifies the individual, while largely paralysing his spiritual independence. It elevates a man above his mundane preoccupation with himself, while deposing and disabling him as a spiritual personality. Revolutionary groups and mass-movements exhibit a similar condition of communal frenzy, in which body and soul go under together in a single passionate surge of collective activity.

This delimitation of the only region of human nature in which identification can occur will play an important part in our assessment of a whole range of metaphysical interpretations which have been applied to the facts of sympathy. I refer to the 'monistic' accounts (of Hegel, Schelling, Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, Bergson, Driesch and Erich Becher).<sup>2</sup> They do not call for acceptance or rejection here. But from the above evidence we may conclude that such theories can only have meaning in the organic sphere, i.e. as evidence for the metaphysical reality of a supra-individual 'life' in all things living, of a primal entelechy in every-thing subject to biological laws; whereas they can never entitle us to infer that one and the same spiritual cosmic principle is likewise active in all finite spirits (the theory of *intellectus infinitus*).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the section 'Die Realität der Nation' in my book *Der Genius des Krieges* (1915) and the essay 'Das Gesamtleben des Krieges' in my *Krieg und Aufbau* (1917).  
<sup>2</sup> Cf. ch. IV *infra*.

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## GENETIC THEORIES OF FELLOW-FEELING

### Chapter III

HERE are several genetic theories of fellow-feeling which, whatever their explanatory value, prove unequal to the phenomena we have dwelt upon.

To commiserate is, as we have seen, to be sorry at another person's sorrow, *as being his*. The fact that it is his is part of the phenomenological situation. There is no question of any sort of identification in feeling with the other person, nor of my sorrow with his. Even in the first-mentioned example above, the process of feeling in the father and the mother is given separately in each case; only *what* they feel—the *one* sorrow—and its value-content, is immediately present to them as identical. In pure emotional infection, on the other hand, the incoming infective emotion is not ascribed to others, but regarded as 'one's own'; only in its causal origins does it relate back to some other person's experience. I have already construed suggestion and the behaviour of crowds on the lines of the herd-animal's relationship to its leader. I would add that a similar transference of experience also plays an important part in the process of forming traditions. 'Tradition' represents a transmission of experience, whether of thought or behaviour, which is the opposite of mere communication or teaching, and likewise of conscious imitation. For in any kind of communication there is a giving, not only of information, but also of the accompanying fact that my informant thinks this, says that, etc. In tradition the latter is absent. Here I believe that 'A is B, because the other person does so, but *without knowing that* he does so; I simply share his opinion without distinguishing the act of understanding the sense of his belief from my own act of opining. Thus I may feel resentment, anger or love for a thing, or a cause,

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because those about me do so, or because my forbears did. But I take the emotions in question to be *my* emotions, engendered by the nature of the case (e.g. the cause itself), and have no suspicion of their origin. This is what gives tradition its binding power, that we take traditional reactions to be our own, and to be entirely derived from the subject-matter to which they refer. It is a corollary of this that the content of tradition does not appear as something past, like a memory, but as a thing present (just as a remembered colour appears as a present sensible appearance of colour). Here we are living in the past—without being aware of the act of remembering which brought us thither, and hence *without realizing that it is the past in which we are living.*<sup>1</sup> Thus a family may have a traditional attitude of predilection, aversion or mistrust for certain occurrent or dispositional values, regardless of who or what may happen to possess them; or some ancestral custom concerning wife and children, for example, may be handed down without the descendants realizing that it has no basis in themselves or in the realities of the situation. Take, for instance, the traditional feud between Guelph and Ghibelline, or the hereditary enmity of German and Gaul.

TRADITIONS  
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Emotional infection between individuals can thus occur over a gap in *time*, there being here no trace of the usual sense of 'relying' the experience—(this actually dissolves the power of tradition)—and no consciousness of the fact of transmission. Such an infection, where a tradition of love is involved, is quite unlike the attitude of *pietas*, which is a particular way of *understanding* the past, plus an attitude of fellow-feeling towards it. *Pietas* already presupposes an intervening lapse of time and a sense of detachment from the matter to which it refers, which have no part in a genuine traditionalism. So long as children continue to *take after* their parents, to feel, think, speak and act as *they* would, without realizing the origin of all this, there can be nothing of *pietas* about them.

Tradition is a sort of halfway house between the inheritance of a mental disposition and conscious communication. It shares with inheritance its automatic and unconscious mode of transference, and with conscious communication its primarily mental influence. Whereas our mental inheritance, in the shape of inherent emotional dispositions and conative tendencies, cannot be eliminated, it is possible, at some later stage of development, to get rid of our traditional loves and hates. Freud's psychoanalytic method, for instance, is an artificial means of eradicating certain genuinely

<sup>1</sup> For identification with a childish disposition of one's own past self, cf. the essay 'Über Reue und Wiedergeburt' (1919) in my *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, Leipzig, 1921.

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traditional emotions, by making their traditional aspect an object  
 of conscious recollection (whence there follows an 'abreaction'  
 from the emotions involved in the original situation and subse-  
 quently repressed). The collective traditions of an entire group  
 are unfortunately incapable, as yet, of being dissolved by such  
 means. Critical historiography (as in Renaissance humanism, or  
 the higher criticism of the Bible), can dissolve traditions by letting  
 loose upon the past, as it were, the power of those ideas and  
 emotions which overshadow and constrict our lives today; but it  
 can only do so among small groups of educated people, never for  
 the population as a whole. It seems to be the rule in such 'criticism'  
 that it only becomes possible when the living tradition, if not  
 actually extinct, is already on its death-bed; it is thus rather a  
*consequence* of the process of dissolution than the real cause of death.  
 Its task is merely to dig the grave for the corpse.<sup>1</sup>  
 It follows from the above that any theory is mistaken which fails  
 to recognize the phenomenologically observable diversity of the  
 two processes of commiseration and of suffering in others, and the  
 fact that the former is directed upon the latter; while any such  
 conception must also fail in its estimate of the *ethical* value of  
 fellow-feeling, on one side or the other. There are a great many  
 such theories, but only the more typical specimens will be dealt  
 with here. They are partly *psychological*, partly metaphysical.  
 Quite a number of philosophers have alleged that the pheno-  
 menological course of fellow-feeling largely consists in a kind of  
comparison, which, if put into words, would run as follows: 'How  
 would it be if this had happened to me?' Whatever the place such  
 a comparison may occupy in life, it certainly has nothing to do  
 with genuine fellow-feeling. If only because the answer would very  
 often be, 'Had it happened to me, with my character and tempera-  
 ment, it would not have been so bad; but being the sort of person  
 he is, it is a serious matter for him.' True fellow-feeling betrays  
 itself in the very fact that it includes the existence and character  
 of the other person as an individual, as part of the object of  
 commiseration or rejoicing. Can one rejoice more profoundly with  
 a person than at his being the perfect, talented, unspoiled indi-  
 vidual *that he is?* or commiserate more deeply than for his having  
 to suffer as he does, being the sort of man he is? In the phenomenon  
<sup>1</sup> The distinguishing of what is inherited from what is traditional is always  
 very difficult in the individual case, and most difficult of all in the problems of  
*Habi*. Herbert Spencer, for instance, considers the categories of primitive  
 instinct and experience in animal-psychology. Cf. Lloyd Morgan: *Instinct and*  
 merely traditional. (Cf. Lévy-Bruhl's Preface to *How Natives Think*.) I incline to  
 the latter view, on account of the great historical and cultural differences in the  
 forms taken by primitive thinking.

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of compassion, which is a heightened commiseration bestowed from above, and from a standpoint of superior power and dignity, commiseration displays its characteristic consideration for the condition of its object, in a special degree. Thus wherever fellow-feeling has a direct reference to the other person, as such, or to the individual uniqueness of his sorrow or joy—which can hardly happen indeed, unless it is based on love—it follows that 'comparison' must already be ruled out as insufficient for an understanding of the situation. Even if the assumption were otherwise correct, it would still cover only those cases in which the emotions involved lie closest to the region of sensory feeling, and farthest from that of the spiritual emotions, which are also the most highly individualized.

But the fact of the matter is that such 'comparison' simply cannot be found in commiseration proper at all. It is a fabrication of those theorists who echo the psychology and ethics of the French Enlightenment in taking the natural egoism of man for granted, and therefore seek to construe the altruistic sentiments, and fellow-feeling likewise, as a consequence or counterpart of some kind to the self-regarding sentiments and attitudes. If, at the moment of reacting in commiseration or rejoicing, we could do so only under the momentary impression, or illusion even, of undergoing the process (ourselves) our attitude would indeed appear, phenomenologically speaking, to be directed merely upon our own sorrow or joy, and would therefore be an egoistic one. A phenomenological reference to the other person as such would no longer be apparent as the immediate purport of the feeling itself. The more so when this theory, having rightly perceived that the comparison is certainly not a matter of judgement and inference, goes on to allege that instead of my merely supposing 'what it would be like for this to happen to me, I really have a fleeing and involuntary illusion of its actually doing so; in short, an emotional hallucination, like the typical case of the soldier in battle who feels his adversary's uplifted sabre cut painfully into his arm, though it never actually strikes him at all. On this view, fellow-feeling would really be a self-regarding emotional reaction, which has acquired the specious appearance of being a special type of feeling owing to a *missapprehension*. For in entertaining this illusion or hallucination I should have a phenomenological awareness of myself as the sufferer; my practical response would be to try to remove its cause, and even though this might lie in the other person's pain or distressing circumstances, such a reaction would be in no way different from one that was aimed at removing discomforts of my own. But from this it is evident that in so far as this attitude is based on illusion and error, no sort of moral value can be ascribed

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to it. Ethics would then have to counsel us: 'Take good care that you don't mistake the miseries of others for your own, or devote your energies to their removal; and if it proved impossible to carry out this injunction, one could only tell the person concerned to 'Go and see a doctor.'

*There is a further case which resembles this spurious type of fellow-feeling, and presents a similar contrast to the real thing: it arises where, although there is an understanding of the other's sorrow, whose effect is to release a reaction of distress, this feeling is not directed upon the other person's condition, but upon the consequent reaction in oneself. An example of this is when someone adopts the maxim 'I must have cheerful faces around me' and thereupon dispenses happiness to those about him; or conversely, when he relieves the woes of others because he can't bear to see that kind of thing; or accedes to the importunities of a beggar or petitioner in order to 'get rid of him' or 'put him out of sight'. And such cases shade into those of mere excess of sensibility, which Nietzsche so misguidedly identified (along with emotional infection), as akin to fellow-feeling; as when a person cannot stand the sight of blood, or 'cannot bear to see a fowl's neck wrung'. The really instructive feature here is the way the agent brings his own pleasure or pain into the foreground of attention, so as to mask their presence in the other person, and concentrates upon these obtrusive feelings of his own. From just such a spurious case as this we may see that genuine instances of fellow-feeling are never self-regarding states of fellow-feeling. But this can be grasped only if we do not lose sight of the sharp distinction between feeling-functions and emotional states. As I have said on a previous occasion: the suffering of pain is a different thing from the pain itself: suffering as a function has quite different thresholds from those of pain, just as the capacity for suffering, joy or satisfaction is distinct from susceptibility to pain or to sensory pleasure (the latter being largely constant in history, whereas the former varies widely according to the level of civilization).<sup>2</sup> Now true fellow-feeling is wholly functional throughout: there is no reference to the state of one's own feelings. In commiserating with B, the latter's state of feeling is given as located entirely in B himself: it does not filter across into A, the commiserator, nor does it produce a corresponding or similar condition in A. It is merely 'commiserated with', not undergone by A as a real experience. It may seem extraordinary that we should be able*

<sup>1</sup> *Der Formalismus in der Ethik*, p. 262 seq. Cf. also the essay 'Vom Sinne des Leidens' (1917) in *Moralia*.  
<sup>2</sup> There is a phase in anaesthesia by narcosis in which the pain is still quite objectively present, though there is no longer any suffering at all.

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