

**FEELING AS THE PRINCIPLE
OF INDIVIDUATION AND
SOCIALIZATION**

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Feeling as the Principle of Individuation and Socialization by Rudolph M. Binder

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RUDOLPH M. BINDER

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FEELING AS THE PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUATION AND SOCIALIZATION.

INTRODUCTION.

WHENEVER we come into relations with our fellowman, one fact impresses itself more strongly on our mind than any other, viz., the infinite variety of their mental constitutions. There are large differences in this respect between the man and the woman, the child and the youth, the man in the prime of life and the man of mature years, the civilized and the barbarian, the lawyer and the scholar, the minister and the business man, the saint and the sinner. Men may differ largely in their physical constitution, but to the careful observer the difference in mental constitution is still greater and more striking. The endless variety in this respect is, indeed, a surprise to everybody. And the surprise grows when we recognize that all these variations arise from the same elementary facts of consciousness. Men seem to hate and love, to desire and reject the same things. They seem to have the same ambitions and aspirations, whether they live in the palace of a king, or in a laborer's cottage. Whence come, then, these differences which make the study of man so absorbingly interesting, and give zest to life?

There are two possibilities. We may explain the differences in the mental constitutions of men through the difference in their environment. There are many reasons in favor of this explanation. For is it not true that man is largely a product of his environment? Has it not been proved again and again that slums in large cities breed lust and crime, simply because the children of the tenements see chiefly these sides of human

activity? Is it not true also that the barbarian has different tastes and views from those of civilized man because his society differs from that of the latter? Why should not environment, then, explain the differences in the mental constitutions of men?

Environment explains some differences, but not all of them,—not even those which are most striking. We find, namely, that men living under the same external conditions vary greatly in disposition and character. Children growing up in the same family, and receiving the same care and instruction, show differences as early as mental life begins to manifest itself. Environment can certainly not be responsible for these. Where, then, must we look for an explanation?

The other possibility suggests itself as a reason to account for the mental differences of men. If they are not to be found in the environment, they must certainly be looked for in the innate tendencies which each man brings with him into the world. They must be a gift from the bountiful hand of nature, which creates not only all men, but even plants and animals with a distinct individuality of their own. In the case of man this individuality is very marked, because it consists not only of physical but also of mental characteristics. The latter are the most significant, and we are, therefore, concerned with them alone. But if the principal differences between men consist of innate mental characteristics, there are three possible ways of explanation. There is a time-honored division of the manifestations of human consciousness into intellect, will, and emotions; and we have no good reason to depart from this division. Let us try to find out, then, whether the differences existing among men are due to their intellect, their will, or their emotions.

We may concede at once to those who claim that the mark of differentiation among men is due to peculiarities of the intellect, that men differ greatly in this respect. We know men to be ignorant or learned, foolish or wise, well-informed or ill-informed. And we rate them accordingly into a scale, with the ignoramus at the lower and the savant at the upper end.

We feel, however, that this classification does not strike the essential difference in the mental constitution of men. The man who is ignorant to-day may be the best informed savant twenty years from now. It has occurred not infrequently that men who stood at the lower end of barbarism have, within a few years of European training, acquired practically all the knowledge which the best seats of learning had to give. The fact is, that what is one man's knowledge may become the knowledge of any other man. To look, consequently, for the most striking differences in the mental constitution of men to the intellect, is not an adequate procedure.

Neither do differences in will-power explain the uniqueness of each human individuality. We do, indeed, classify men as weak and strong according to their will-power, as fickle and persevering according to the duration of the application of their powers to the carrying out of plans. But here we again feel that the classification is inadequate, since the same man may pursue one plan tenaciously and another half-heartedly. A man who appears to-day as absolutely incapable of carrying out a plan consistently, may to-morrow, with a proper motive to action, surprise everybody with his enthusiastic persistence in obtaining a certain end. The will, then, does not give us a criterion of individual differences, because what one man *wills*, all men *may will*.

There remain only the emotions as a possible explanation of differentiation. The objection will, however, immediately be made that as the same man *wills* one thing more than another, or *knows* one thing better than another, so he likes one thing better than another, and that, consequently, men differ no more in regard to their emotions than they do in regard to their volitions and cognitions. We may admit this objection to be valid, and we may also admit that the same man likes one thing strongly to-day, which he liked but little yesterday, because he has found that other men like it strongly. There seems to be, therefore, but little difference between men even in their emotions, since these seem to be as common to all men as their volitions and their cognitions. And still, there is a difference

here, namely, in regard to the degree in which they can be communicated and objectified. It is clear that knowledge can be communicated, since our whole educational system is based on that presupposition. It is also clear that volitions can be objectified as soon as they find their consummation in action. But emotions *per se* can neither be communicated nor objectified. If we talk or write about them, it is knowledge concerning them that we communicate, and not emotions. If they impel us to action, it is the volition which is objectified, and not the emotions. We may gauge their strength and quality from the state of knowledge and the kind of action which they produce, but we can never know an emotion directly. Here we have, then, a state of consciousness which is confined to the individual. Consciousness as a state of cognition and of volition is communicable and objectifiable through physical media; but consciousness as a state of emotion must become cognition or volition in order to be noticed at all by the observer. It may be possible, therefore, that all men have the same emotions, but they are confined to the individual consciousness in each case. They cannot be shared, while cognitions and volitions may become public property and be shared by all. What one man knows, all men may know; what one man does, all men may do. But what you or I feel, other men may feel only in so far as the states of knowledge communicated to them about your or my emotions produce similar emotions in them. And the latter does not always take place. Two men may have knowledge of the same fact, *e. g.*, of my love, but in the one an emotion of hatred will be produced against me, while in the other, this knowledge may result in love for me, or in a feeling of indifference, or perhaps in nothing at all beyond the mere fact of knowledge. Emotions, or, using the broader term, feelings, are, then, strictly individual.

We may approach the same problem from another point of view. Why do men seek certain kinds of information, or do certain acts? The answer—both of common sense and of psychology—is, that they like them, *i. e.*, these acts and this information have an interest for them because they produce