

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUGGESTION

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CHAPTER II

THE CLASSIFICATION OF SUGGESTION AND SUGGESTIBILITY

ONCE the subject-matter under investigation is defined, we must proceed to a further subdivision of it; we must define and classify the different species of suggestion and suggestibility. Already in our last chapter, in adducing different cases of suggestion, suggestibility in the normal state was tacitly implied. We have now reached a stage in our discussion in which we must state this fact more explicitly. The soil favourable for the seeds of suggestion exists also in what we call the normal individual. Suggestibility is present in what we call the normal state, and in order to reveal it we must only know how to tap it. The suggestible element is a constituent of our nature; it never leaves us; it is always present in us. Before Janet, Binet, and many other investigators undertook the study of hysterical subjects, no one suspected the existence of those remarkable phenomena of double consciousness that opened for us new regions in the psychical life of man. These phenomena were merely not noticed, although present all the while; and when at times they rose from their

obscurity, came to light, and obtruded themselves on the attention of people, they were either put down as sorcery, witchcraft, or classed contemptuously with lying, cheating, and deception. The same is true with regard to normal suggestibility. It rarely attracts our attention, as it manifests itself in but trifling things. When, however, it rises to the surface and with the savage fury of a hurricane cripples and maims on its way everything it can not destroy, menaces life, and throws social order into the wildest confusion possible, we put it down as mobs. We do not in the least suspect that the awful, destructive, automatic spirit of the mob moves in the bosom of the peaceful crowd, reposes in the heart of the quiet assembly, and slumbers in the breast of the law-abiding citizen. We do not suspect that the spirit of suggestibility lies hidden even in the best of men; like the evil jinnee of the Arabian tales is corked up in the innocent-looking bottle. Deep down in the nature of man we find hidden the spirit of suggestibility. Every one of us is more or less suggestible. Man is often defined as a social animal. This definition is no doubt true, but it conveys little information as to the psychical state of each individual within society. There exists another definition which claims to give an insight into the nature of man, and that is the well-known ancient view that man is a rational animal; but this definition breaks down as soon as we come to test it by facts of life, for it scarcely holds true of the vast multitudes of mankind. Not sociality, not rationality, but suggestibility is what characterizes the average specimen of humanity, for *man is a suggestible animal*.

The fact of suggestibility existing in the normal individual is of the highest importance in the theoretical field of knowledge, in psychology, sociology, ethics, history, as well as in practical life, in education, politics, and economics; and since this fact of

suggestibility may be subject to doubt on account of its seeming paradoxicalness, it must therefore be established on a firm basis by a rigorous experimentation, and I have taken great pains to prove this fact satisfactorily. The evidence for the existence of normal suggestibility I shall adduce later on in our discussion; meanwhile I ask the reader to take it on trust, sincerely hoping that he will at the end be perfectly satisfied with the demonstration of its truth.

The presence of suggestibility in such states as the hysterical and the hypnotic is a fact well proved and attested, and I think there is no need to say a word in its defence. Since the hysterical, the hypnotic, the somnambolic states do not belong to the routine of our experience; since they are but rare and occur under special peculiar conditions; since they unfit one for social life, disable in the struggle for existence, I think the reader will not quarrel with me for naming such states abnormal.

Thus it becomes quite clear that suggestibility must be classed under two heads: (1) Suggestibility in the normal state, or normal suggestibility, and (2) suggestibility in the abnormal state, or abnormal suggestibility.

Turning now to suggestion, we find that it can be easily subdivided and classified according to the mode it is effected in consciousness. Concrete examples will best illustrate my meaning. The hypnotizer commands his subject to walk; the latter walks. He raises the hand of the patient, and it remains uplifted in a contracted cataleptic condition. The hypnotizer tells the subject that after awakening, when he will hear a knock, he will take off his coat and dance a polka, and the subject, on awakening and perceiving the signal, fulfils the order most faithfully. In cases like these the experimenter gives his orders or suggestions *directly*,

without beating round the bush, without any circumlocution, without any evasions. In a plain and brusque manner does the hypnotizer give his suggestion, so much so that it partakes of the nature of an imperative command issued by the order of the highest authority from which there is no appeal. The essential feature here, however, is not so much the authoritativeness, for in many cases it may be totally absent, and a courteous, bland way of expression may be used; not so much the authoritativeness, I say, as the plainness, the directness with which the suggestion is given. Such a suggestion we may designate as *direct suggestion*.

Suggestions may also be given in quite a different way. Instead of openly telling the subject what he should do, the experimenter produces some object, or makes a movement, a gesture, which in their own silent fashion tell the subject what to do. To illustrate it by a few examples, so as to make my meaning clearer: I stretch out the hand of the hypnotic subject and make it rigid, and while during this I press his arm with an iron rod. In the next *séance* as soon as the iron rod touches the arm the hand becomes rigid. I tell the subject to spell the word "Napoleon," and when he comes to "p" I stretch out my hand and make it stiff; the subject begins to stammer; the muscles of his lips spasmodically contract and stiffen. Dr. Tuckey brings a case of suggestion given by him unintentionally in such an indirect way. He hypnotized a physician and ordered him to wake up in a quarter of an hour. He then left the room for about half an hour, being sure that in the meantime the subject would come back to himself. When he returned he was surprised to find the patient still sitting in the chair, and in the most distressed condition possible. The patient could not recover his speech; his jaws were firmly shut. Dr. Tuckey thinks that while hypnotizing he inadvertently passed his

hand over the mouth of the subject, and this was taken as a suggestion to keep the mouth firmly shut. My friend who drank the glass of water on account of my suggestive movements; Mr. P., whom Prof. Ochorowitz suggested to whistle certain airs; the crowd that was induced by the politician by means of flattery and talk of business prosperity to vote for the party whose cause he advocated—all these are good cases of this type of suggestion. This mode of influencing the mind plays a great part in the history of humanity, and is therefore of great importance in sociology. Such a kind of suggestion may be properly designated as indirect suggestion.

Suggestion partakes of the nature of reflex action. This truth was implied in our discussion of the last chapter, and in the definition of suggestion we finally arrived at. And authorities are not lacking who go to support the same view. "Eine sorgfältige Beobachtung," writes Prof. Forel, "der Bedingungen der Suggestibilität bringt uns immer wieder auf die relativ Ruhe des Gehirns zurück, auf einen plastischen Zustand desselben oder wenigstens eines Theiles desselben, worin die Vorstellungen eine schwächere Kraft oder Tendenz haben sich associiren und deshalb leichter dem von aussen kommenden Impuls folgen." "Der Mechanismus (der Suggestion)," writes Dr. Bernheim, "ist ein physiologischer mechanismus dessen Realisation sich mit den Eigenschaften unseres Hirn ganz gut vereinbaren lässt."¹ What Dr. Bernheim means to say here is that suggestion partakes of the nature of the reflex and automatic activity that characterizes the physiological mechanism in general. He makes himself more explicit in another place. "The mechanism of suggestion," he writes in his book *Suggestive Therapeutics*, "may be summed up in the following formula: Increase of the *reflex* ideo-motor, ideo-

sensitive, and ideosensorial excitability."

Gourney tells us in his simple straightforward way that the mechanism of "suggestion is conscious reflex action."² As reflex action of consciousness, suggestion has a double aspect: afferent, centripetal, or sensory, and efferent, centrifugal, or motor. This is perfectly obvious, for in suggestion we deal, on the one hand, with the impression of the suggested idea on the mind and its acceptance by consciousness; this is the afferent, sensory side of suggestion; and, on the other hand, with the realization of the accepted idea; this is the efferent, motor side of suggestion. The process of suggestion may therefore be represented in the form of an arc, which may be called the suggestion arc. It is quite clear that in classifying suggestion as direct and indirect, we had solely in view the afferent, the sensory aspect of suggestion. If now we regard suggestion from the other aspect, from the efferent or motor aspect, we find that suggestion is subject to another subdivision. Concrete instances will bring out this subdivision most clearly.

The experimenter suggests to the subject to turn over the chair and sit down near it on the floor. This is faithfully and immediately carried out by the subject. The experimenter raises the patient's arm and bends it immediately the and becomes stiff, rigid, cataleptic. The suggested idea impressed on the brain is immediately discharged into the motor tracts. The same holds true of post-hypnotic or deferred suggestion. The idea suggested or the order given is present in the mind, only there is present a suggested obstacle to its motor discharge; but as soon as some kind of suggested signal is perceived, the obstacle is removed and the idea immediately discharges itself along the motor tracts. I hypnotized one of my subjects, Mr. F., and ordered him that on

awakening, when he hears me cough, he should put out the gas. I woke him up. He remained quietly sitting in his chair, waiting, as it seemed, for my signal. He himself, however, was not in the least conscious of it; for when his brother asked him whether he would like to go home, as it was rather late, he answered in the negative. I then coughed, and Mr. F. immediately rushed for the light and put it out. What we find here is the literal carrying out of the suggested idea. This kind of suggestion the realization of which bears a direct and immediate relation to the suggested object or act is, of course, also present in normal suggestibility, as in the case of the buyer who chooses the goods suggested to him by the salesman or huckster, as in the case of the citizen who votes for the unknown candidate suggested to him by the politician. In short, when there is full and complete realization of the idea or order suggested, directly or indirectly, we have that kind of suggestion which I designate as *immediate*.

Instead, however, of immediately taking the hint and fully carrying it into execution, the subject may realize something else, either what is closely allied with the idea suggested or what is connected with it by association of contiguity. A suggestion is given to the subject that when he wakes up he will see a tiger. He is awakened, and sees a big cat. The subject is suggested that on awakening he will steal the pocketbook lying on the table. When aroused from the hypnotic state he goes up to the table, does not take the pocketbook, but the pencil that lies close to it. The buyer does not always choose the precise thing which the salesman suggests, but some other thing closely allied to it. In case the suggestion is not successful, it is still, as a rule, realized in some indirect and mediate way. Man is not always doing what has been suggested to him; he sometimes obeys not the suggested idea

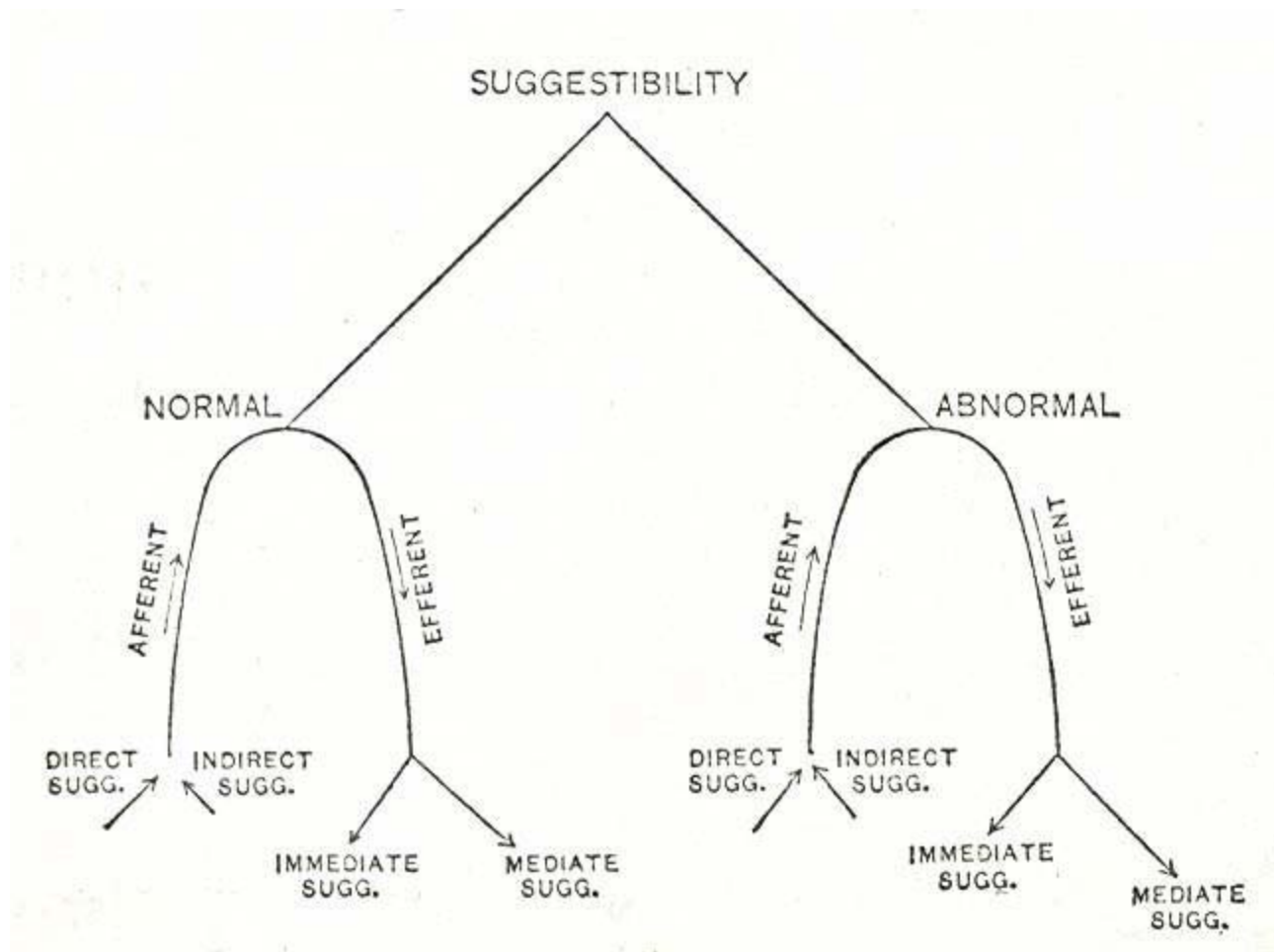
itself, but some other idea associated with the former by contiguity, similarity, or contrast. Suggestion by contrast is especially interesting, as it often gives rise to counter-suggestion. Now such kind of suggestion, where not the suggested idea itself but the one associated with it is realized, I designate as *mediate*.

Thus we have four kinds of suggestion:

(a) Direct. (d) Immediate.

(b) Indirect. (e) Mediate.

The classification of suggestion and suggestibility may be represented in terms of the suggestion are in the following diagrammatic form:



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1. Zeitschrift für Hypnotismus, Januar, 1893.
 2. Mind, Oct., 1884.

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