

Leading Psychologists Discuss Emotions

What is an emotion? How does it work? This is the problem that some of the world's leading psychologists discussed, in person and by proxy, at Wittenberg College, October 19 to 22.

William James Was Right

We do not run away from a bear because we are afraid; we are afraid because we run. This theory, which caused a sensation in scientific circles when the psychologist William James advanced it some 40 years ago, and which has since become old-fashioned, was dusted off and brought out with improvements by Prof. E. Claparede, of the University of Geneva.

It is not the sight of the bear but the process of getting ready to run that warns us that we are in danger, Professor Claparede maintains. The feeling of danger is useful because it urges the man to seek safety. If he can run fast enough, he proceeds to escape without any emotion at all. But if he lacks faith in his legs, his body is thrown into a state of excitement as he tries to run and he is made conscious that he is gripped by fear.

"Feelings are useful in our conduct, while the emotions serve no purpose," Professor Claparede concludes. "The uselessness, or even the nuisance of the emotion is known to every one. Here is an individual who would cross the street. If he is afraid of automobiles, he loses his composure and is run over. Sorrow, joy, anger, by enfeebling attention or judgment, often make us commit regrettable acts. In brief, the individual in the grip of an emotion loses his head."

The Emotions of a Crab

A crab fettered by one claw and left with food just out of reach will resignedly starve to death. But put a polyp, the crab's most deadly enemy, nearby, and the prisoner crab will be convulsed with fear. Excitement racing through its nerves will send a violent shock to the tied claw and the claw will come off, so that the crab can scuttle off to safety.

This example of how emotions bring about intense unusual activity in animals was described in a paper sent by Prof. Henri Pieron, of the University of Paris.

From the amoeba, one of the simplest, tiniest forms of animal life, up to man, action is always guided by feelings, the French psychologist said. Even purely mental action in man, which we call thought, is regulated by his state of feeling. If the feelings become sufficiently intense

so that there is an abnormal discharge of nervous energy, the emotional stage is reached.

In emergencies, this nervous energy gives the animal or man greater power to fight or flee. But the after effect is nervous exhaustion, and temporary disorganization of the body machinery, Professor Pieron said.

In a man, if he is highly emotional and if he is not well balanced, the emergency reserve of energy may be a source of real danger, he concluded, "like large ponds, established along a water course, which accumulate the available energy and may cause disastrous inundations if the barriers begin to give way before a sudden onslaught."

In the animal world as among men, emotions sometimes lead to useless outbursts of activity, he declared, saying: "An ant, coming upon a spot of soil near its nest which has been saturated with the odor of foreign ants, sometimes begins to strike the ground violently with its mandibles, instead of being content to flee or to explore carefully the neighborhood of the suspicious place."

Superiority Human Goal

The most important single factor in individual psychology is a feeling of inferiority, according to Dr. Alfred Adler, noted Viennese psychoanalyst, one time pupil of Sigmund Freud.

From the time of the child's first social contacts, with his mother, his aim through life is to overcome difficulties of life and to gain superiority, said Dr. Adler. The mother must try to give the little child freedom to develop his superiority through independence, self-confidence, and courage. Later, she must spread the interest of the child to other persons and situations, so that he feels at home in the world.

Three types of young children have difficulty in attaining the goal of normal superiority toward which every human being strives, he said:

"First, children with imperfect organs; they need more time and more effort than others to integrate. Second, spoiled children. They are not free to function alone, and develop in the direction of always wishing to be supported. They are attacked on all sides because of this behavior, and feel in a hostile environment and therefore under strain. Third, hated children—illegitimate, not wanted, ugly, crippled. They have the same

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Gland Extract Helps Eyes

Epinephrin, the drug that is extracted from the suprarenal glands, may be a remedy for near-sightedness. Dr. Meyer Wiener of St. Louis has tried out minute quantities of the powerful drug on patients with progressive myopia, and in a preliminary report of his results to the American Medical Association states his belief in its value in correcting this derangement of vision.

Medical opinion as to the cause of myopia is divided. It is thought to be hereditary within certain limits. Application to close work has also long been blamed as a cause of the failure of the eyes in its progressive phase. Most physicians agree that the stretching of the outer layer of the eyeball is an important factor, but just how this comes about is still a mystery.

Exercise and diet, it is generally agreed, help as much as anything. The ranch life of Theodore Roosevelt is a classic example of what fresh air and out-of-door work will do to help bad eyes as well as the physique generally. It has been proved that exercise increases the epinephrin output of the suprarenal glands, and it is to this factor that Dr. Wiener attributes the improvement that short-sighted people gain from physical exertion.

"It is shown," he stated, "that both exercise and diet influence the secretion of the suprarenals, and that the local application of suprarenal secretion increases tissue metabolism. It is quite possible that the cramped position often assumed in reading and close application of the eyes might have a deterrent effect on the secretion of the suprarenals."

Acting on this theory, Dr. Wiener began the practice of instilling small amounts of epinephrin into the eyes of patients with progressive myopia. He recommended at the same time exercise and fresh air, but restricted reading only to the extent that it must not interfere with the daily exercise. His cases following this procedure have shown such encouraging results that further reports are awaited by medical circles with considerable interest.

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Pulling contests between draft horses, using a piece of apparatus which measures the exact pulling power of a team, are a recent attraction at country fairs.