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Instinct and habit: their value to religion

INSTINCT AND HABIT:
THEIR VALUE TO RELIGION.

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OUTLINE.

INTRODUCTION:-

Early use of the word INSTINCT.

Ancient Treatment of Human Conduct.

Locations of "SEAT" of Human Conduct.

Contribution of Psychology.

Branches of Psychology.

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Definitions of Instinct.

"Ripening" of Instincts.

Modification of Instincts.
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General Rule:-
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- 1.-Professor Angell's Analogy.
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2.-Child is Moral Being by Instinct.
(A.)Right environment transfers Moral Instinct into Moral Habits.
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(A.)Right environment needed to utilize "Gang" Instinct.
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(A.)Study of two Children living alone on an Island.
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IV.CONCLUSION:-

Good Habits formed as easily as bad ones.

Regulation of Habits and Instinct through Environment and Instruction will hasten God's Kingdom on Earth.

I N S T I N C T A N D H A B I T :
T H E I R V A L U E T O R E L I G I O N .

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Until a comparitively recent date the term INSTINCT was generally applied to the extraordinary actions of the lower animals, and seldom thot of as being at the basis of the ordinary activities thru which the animals sustains life. A little later, the extraordinary actions were looked upon by some as a proof that animals reason, and INSTINCT was then applied to a few outstanding traits, but always connoted a certain sense of animal "reasoning" or foresight. For example, the fact that birds were building their nests especially comfortable and warm when there happened to be plenty of useful material around, or that squirrels were storing away an extra large quanity of nuts, when, as a matter of fact, it was a year of plenty, these facts would appear upon the front page of our daily papers with the "surprising" statement that we would have an exceptionally cold winter, because the animals by "instinct" were preparing for it.

We never heard the word INSTINCT used in connection with man. Man haw no instincts, it was thot. He is an animal with reasoning power, and is devoid of the involuntary foresight, which was given by Providence, as it seemed

to protect the lower animals.

Not until the last decade have we been able to clear up many of the misconceptions concerning animal and human behavior, and this was done thru the marvelous revelations made by the science called "Psychology", a study of the mind. No one science has thrown more light upon the problems of being and behavior. From the time of Moses and the prophets of Israel, thru the Chinese, Greek, English and German philosophers, and even in our own time, various philosophies of human conduct have been drudgingly worked out and tabulated. Some men in the race had been murderers, some of them thieves, still others attempted to disturb the quiet domestic conditions of their neighbors, and so, without attempting to explain the causes of such actions, a code of laws was drawn up to cripple all such evil tendencies in man. The law explicitly stated: "Thou shalt not kill, nor steal, nor envy thy neighbor his wife, his servants, his oxen, land, and so forth. Those that violated these laws should give life for life, eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth. Confuscius and Buddha, tho great philosophers of their time, controlled and narrowed down human activities to that of mere imitation as found in ancestral worship

The Greek philosophers, beginning with Socrates, began to study man in his relation to the outer world and

to God, as well as to attempt to explain the problem of good and evil in human life. For men living 2500 years ago, the Greeks are to be congratulated, because their imaginative analytical minds, in making philosophy introspective, have reached some conclusions that come pretty close to modern science.

Since the time of the Greek Philosophers, man has been everything from a mere "puppet", on the one hand, with whom God arbitrarily plays thru a brief scene upon the stage of life and then casts him aside forever, or places him among His favorite few; to a self-dependent being, on the other hand, evolving, without the aid of a god, from the monocellular Amobea, and springing finally from the ape as the product of a long evolution. In the first extreme, human conduct can only be explained as that which has been foreordained by a despotic God, and in the second, as that resulting from a fight for existence. Both of these hypotheses have made a deep and lasting impression upon their age, but the pendulum of thot has receded, and due to the friction caused by the opposition against the theory of evolution, it now swings complacently within the region of modern sciences.

The seat of human conduct has been placed in various parts of the body. The Hebrew prophets spoke of it

as the heart, and we still often speak figurativly in the same way. Still others, especially Greek New Testament thinkers, made the bowels the seat of conduct resulting from emotion. Others, without attempting to locate it, made it the depths of the soul. And finally, it has been made a matter of the brain or mind. From Phrenology we have passed out of a semi-pseudo sciemce into a real one, namely - PSYCHOLOGY -, and thru its aid we have advanced more in ten years than in all the preceding milleniums as regards human understanding and conduct.

Psychology has branched off into a dozen or more useful channels, such as:-

General Psychology,
Comparative " ,
Child " ,
Abnormal " ,
Introspective " ,
Individual " ,
Criminal " ,
Social " ,
Genetic " ,
Animal " ,
Etc, Etc.....

Animal Psychology has thrown new light upon INSTINCT, and we now see that every untutored activity, such as the

scratching for food by the incubated chick, the burying of bones by isolated dogs, the singing and flying of birds, the playfullness of kittens, whelps and other offspring, as well as every ordinary activity of animals, can be accounted for thru INSTINCT. It next dawned upon man, that he, the human being that stood aloof, as he thot, from any such blind activities as are manifested in animals, must explain much of his own behavior in the same way, and so today, man, the highest type of animal, has attributed to him the largest number of instincts. We will enumerate a few of the most important ones:- Crying, grasping, creeping, walking, talking, singing, running, climbing, fighting, laughing, plus all the others, and then the instincts of inner life, which usually call for outward manifestation, such as anger, fear, shyness, curiosity, affection, sexual love, jealousy, rivalry, play, sociability, sympathy, modesty, imitation, constructiveness, secretiveness, acquisitiveness, reverence, religious propensity, and so on down the list.

The question may well be raised at this point,- What is an INSTINCT? To answer this, we will give several definitions and illustrations. The Standard Dictionary defines it as follows:- A natural spontaneous impulse or propensity, especially in lower animals, that moves them

without reasoning towards the actions that are essential to their existence, preservation and development." Professor William James of Harvard calls it," The faculty of acting in such a way as to produce certain ends, without foresight of the ends, and without previous education in the performance." Professor James Rowland Angell of Chicago University, without attempting any concrete definition, gives us the following statements which throw much light upon the physiological basis of INSTINCT.- "There are certain number of automatic and reflex coördinations provided at birth; Such as respiration, circulation and digestion are carried on from the first for they are the automatic coordinations. Reflexes, such as sucking, crying and grasping, readily take place." Now it is difficult to make a sharp distinction between simple reflexes and instinct. At Best, it seems to me, reflexes may be called sense impulses that have been "short circuted" into motor activity within the spinal column without necessarily becoming known to the higher brain center, whereas INSTINCT usually involves consciousness, at least in the higher animals.

Our own defintion of INSTINCT may perhaps be formulated thus:- Those activities or propensities, which express the natural assertion of inherited neural pathways,

without the need of previous instruction in the activity or knowledge of the end to be reached. These neural channels of activities are innate, because they were ingrained upon the nervous systems of the progenitors thru the law of habit. Thus the incubated chick scratches upon the wooden floor, because for thousands of years its ancestors spent most of their time scratching for food. For the same reason the kitten, seeing a moving object, leaps upon it, not because it recognizes the object as a feather, a ball, or a mouse, but because its ancestors were so fond of mice, that it became a large part of their exercise to catch mice and eat them.

In using the above illustrations, these questions may have been raised in our minds:- Do instincts control motor activities only at birth? And, Is the activity caused by INSTINCT invariable?

In reply to the first question, we would say, that instincts appear at various stages in the growth of the nervous system approaching maturity. For example:- the flying instinct of birds would not appear until the second or third week. The instinct of nest-building not until the eleventh or twelth month. Numerous other instances could be given of this ripening of instincts, as psychologists call the process.

As regard to the second question, INSTINCTS are most emphatically affected or modified by enviroment and experience. Why is it that the chick ceases scratching upon the wooden floor after a day or so, whereas the kitten preys upon the next rapidly moving black object it sees? Simply because, in the case of the chick, that activity produced no favorable result, and so was temporily suppressed, whereas, in the case of the kitten, the activity resulted in a very favorable dinner, and so was repeated. Now the continuance of inappropriate conditions, when any given INSTINCT is most vivid or "ripe", will result in the permanent suppression of that INSTINCT. The caged canary ceases to attempt to build a nest, and the house dog to bury a bone, when those instincts had received no more encouragement than sand for the canary, and a carpeted floor for the dog.

The modification of INSTINCTS thru experience may be explained in the following way:- A dog instinctly begins to fight a Maltese cat, and as a result, receives a bad scratching of the face. He will most probably quit fighting cats, altho the FIGHT INSTINCT will remain, and he may then take delight in fighting small dogs.
A child, being frightened by the bark of a large dog when the FEAR INSTINCT is vivid, will grow up into manhood, and always entertain a fear for dogs, whereas that same

Child may not entertain the slightest fear of a lion running at large in the mountains, because it had always seen lions at the Zoo, lying quietly in their cages. A general rule governing INSTINCTS may then, perhaps, be this:- INSTINCTS that effect favorable ends, tend to repeat themselves, and form into HABITS, but those that end unfavorably or without result, become temporarily or permanently suppressed.

Now every instinctive act, when performed by an animal with memory, ceases to be blind after being once repeated. For this reason, human INSTINCTS are subject to more rapid modification than animal INSTINCTS, because rational process immediately follows the end reached. Human HABITS are therefore formed quicker than animals Habits. What then is a HABIT? The Standard Dictionary gives the following definition:- "A tendency or inclination toward an action or condition, which by repitition has become easy".

We have just seen, that every "blind" or instinctive act not suppressed, but coupled up with experience, and, in the case of man, with reasoning process, is the starting point of a **HABIT.** This does not mean, however, that every HABIT is the result of an INSTINCT, because many HABITS are produced thru reason and experience.

Walking, for example, is a HABIT resulting thru the perpetuation of an INSTINCT, but walking to school or to work over a certain route is a HABIT resulting from reason or experience. Herein is the excellence of man over all other animals, namely, that, thru the power of reason, he may turn the instinctive activities into any sort of a HABIT that he desires, and he may, at will, make any number of new HABITS, or break old ones.

From a physiological point of view, a HABIT is a pathway of motor discharge by which an impulse may easily escape. Muscular coordination, in the attainment of every HABIT, is, however, crude and disorganized at first. All surrounding nerves and muscles are called into play, and much energy is lost. After a certain act has been formed several times, the unused adjacent nerves and muscles will gradually be eliminated from that act, and the used ones will coordinate more easily and quicker at each performance. Let us take for example, the act of writing. In childhood, the whole hand, arm, and sometimes the head and mouth are put into action while the child traces out the large awkward letters. The writing of a few words will cause much fatigue, because the muscles are all trying to assert themselves, and there results a heavy nervous strain. After several performances, the grip upon

the pencil is somewhat relaxed, the head and mouth actions will probably drop out, and the coordinations from the motor-centre of the brain to the finger tips will become such, that later, as a penman, the finest and most artistic shading can be done without noticible effort or fatigue.

Professor Angell explains neural and muscular co-ordinations in HABIT formation somewhat in the following way. If a spring were to bubble up from the top of a small summit, at first the water would trickle down in a dozen or more different directions, but after a while, one of those channels would become deeper and deeper, until the whole discharge would flow thru it. We may offer the following illustration, perhaps. Let us suppose a desired telephone connection between Boston and Warren, Ohio. The general direction would be known, but study and confusion would, at first, be necessary to get thru wires to Buffalo and Cleveland, and then, perhaps, still more confusion to locate and connect up with Warren. If, however, that connection was made every day, or several times a week, hesitation and misdirection would gradually be eliminated, until the two localities would be connected up with considerable rapidity, and permitted to communicate without interference from the smaller branch lines.

When any given HABIT becomes well enough establish-

ed, its function becomes entrusted more to the lower brain centres and reflex action. Now the value of this is inestimable. Suppose we were to awaken tomorrow morning and were deplete of all our HABITS, how to speak, how to walk, how to clothe ourselves, and so on, we would find ourselves thrust back to our early childhood, and would have to relearn everything. We do not ordinarily stop to think that thousands of our motor activities every day are controlled by the lower brain centres, thus leaving the higher centres free for other purposes. It is due only to this arrangement that a man may be walking, and at the same time be conversing with a friend, or composing a poem, or whistling a tune. In fact, a person may do several things at once and still leave the higher brain centre free. The violinist may beat time with his foot, sway his body and head with the music, finger the strings, move the bow, and even sing the music, without giving thot to anything but the technique of the selection he is playing. The muscular coordinations over his entire body practically, do not require the focus of his attention. He no longer thinks of notes by their names as C# of G, but seeing them, reflexively places his finger upon the right place and draws the bow over the string , thus producing the required note.

Now, as we said in the beginning, neural and muscular

coordinations remained a dark mystery thru all the ages, and so conduct, good and bad, was accounted for in other ways. The heathen, as well as the early Israelites, looked upon good and evil as inherited, and so, when a great crime was commited, such as a murder, the entire tribe or, more frequently, the entire family was exterminated to prevent the spread of that evil. The later prophets of Israel were forced to see, by the existing conditions of their time, that each individual was held accountable before God for his own sins, and not for the sins of others, but they could not explain the psychology of good and evil. They made conduct a matter of the heart as we have said before.

So here comes in the religious value of INSTINCT and HABIT, those two factors that control practically all human conduct. INSTINCT being the assertion of inherited neural pathways, which represent the predominent behavior of our ancestors; and HABIT, the perpetuation of such behavior, or the formation of new activities thru reason or environment.

But some one may say, if INSTINCTS are inherited neural pathways, representing the predominent HABITS of our ancestors, is that not an argument for inherited good and evil? That is to say, if a man's ancestors for three or four generations had been learned professors, would not

that man inherit their wisdom and likewise become learned man, whereas, had they been expert bank robbers, would he not inherit their expert ability of cracking safes. The folly of such a question is self-evident. Some such law may seem to hold true in animal life. For example, the lamb seems to inherit the meek and dependent attitude of its ancestors, whereas the liom and the chicken-hawk seem to inherit the ability of being expert murderers and thieves. But here again we see that these good or evil traits are not inherited, but merely the tendency toward them, which instinctive propensities almost invariably formulate themselves into habits, due to the favorable results produced. If, however, the lamb were cast out alone in the woods, and could survive long enough the attacks of its enimies, it would soon become bold and ferocious, whereas the caged whelp can be so trained, that it will be as meek as a lamb.

So also in the case of human beings, only tendencies for good and evil are inherited. Nero did not inherit the innumerable evils of his ancestors, but was a product of his corrupt time and enviroment. The word ENVIROMENT contributes more to our thesis than does the word INHERIT. Human beings inherit tendencies , as in INSTINCTS, but these INSTINCTS are influenced largely by the ENVIROMENT, which helps them form into HABITS, or suppresses them. ENVIROMENT practically controls the

prince of all INSTINCTS, namely IMITATION. It Influences also FEAR, BOLDNESS; LOVE, HATRED; SYMPATHY, CRUELTY; ALTRUISM, SELFISHNESS; SOCIABILITY, SHYNESS; PLAY, PUGNACITY; MODESTY, CURIOSITY: OPEN-MINDEDNESS, JEALOUSY, and scores of other INSTINCTS.

Proper ENVIROMENT, then, is the first consideration for every child that is born. Good habits can be formed just as easily as bad ones, and ENVIROMENT will determine, in a large measure, whether a child is to possess good or bad HABITS. To prove our point, we will consider briefly the development of two children born on the same day. The one child born of kind (Christian) parents, in a well kept house, and with clean surroundings; the other born of wicked parents in the "slums", with all its filth. To intensify our study, we will suppose a possible transfer of the two children that the "slum" child may be brought up under the favorable conditions, and vice versa.

The child that had inherited a healthy body and good tendencies, would see the chaotic conditions of the room and its surroundings in the Slums, and from the very start, a deep impression of disorder would be made upon its mind. As it grows older and the INSTINCT of IMITATION ripens, it will yell and swear, without malice or forethot, it will smoke tobacco and drink intoxicants, and form numerous other bad habits, in IMITATION of those about him.

Because of his fight for life, the INSTINCTS of PUGNACITY, CRUELTY, SELFISHNESS, HATRED, DESTRUCTIVENESS, and all the other so-called "BASSER INSTINCTS",will receive such encouragement, until the child is by HABIT profane, cruel, greedy, disagreeable, destructive, and may eventually become a thief, murderer, or, in general, a dangerous character to the community or nation.

But how about the "slum-born" child in the better ENVIROMENT? Order and cleanliness will be the first impression upon its mind. Its face will be soft and cheerful because it returns the many smiles of those about it. When the INSTINCT to imitate becomes vivid, it will speak in gentle tones and use good language. It will become like those around him, polite,altruistic, sociable, kind, and constructive, growing up to be a useful citizen to the community and nation.

If ENVIROMENT, then, means so much in determining the type of habits children are going to form, it is the duty of the church, the community, and the government to see to it that the proper ENVIROMENT is provided. The tenements, if they are to remain, should be well built, well ventulated and with sufficient space for light. Schools, with good and liberal instruction, play-grounds, public baths, clean cummunity entertainment and churches

must all be placed at the disposal of the child, that he may be directed in the formation of his HABITS.

If the proper ENVIROMENT is supplied, there need be little fear about the religious wellfare of the child, because the child is religiously inclined bt INSTINCT. In fact, if a neighborhood is of such a type, that it is producing boys and girls with good and useful HABITS, that neighborhood, by its very nature, is a by-product of a religious influence, and we might as well say of CHRISTIANITY because it alone has been the religion that has called forth and perpetuated UNIVERSAL LOVE, UNSELFISH SACRIFICE, PEACE, GOOD-WILL toward men, as well as the other soecalled "HIGHER INSTINCTS".

The Christian community is beginning to see that its obligation is not so much the building of jails and insane asylums, as it is to do away with the existing conditions that keep such institutions continually well filled. The Christian church is beginning to realize that its main mission is not to heal the sick and save the old "burnt-out" sinner, but to preach the gospel of LOVE and PEACE, to instruct the youth against the HABITS that bring on desease and sin, and to fortify the child by fighting down the still existing evils.

Child Psychology has thrown most interesting useful data upon the INSTINCTS and HABITS of child life. The

community is not called upon to make the child a moral being, for God has already made him such by INSTINCT, but the community is held responsible for the proper ENVIROMENT and INSTRUCTION, so that these MORAL INSTINCTS, when they appear will be rightly directed into good HABITS. The community need not make the youth a social being, because he is that also by nature or INSTINCT. It must, however, turn into helpful channels the outcropping energies of the "gang", by providing parks, athletic fields, and club rooms. Athletics, "Gymn" teams, cooking and sewing classes, as well as literary and dramatic clubs should be provided for the girls.

When the "gang" INSTINCT is strong, it is the church's opportunity, as well as duty, to promote wholesome fellowship, to encourage club organizations, and to direct this self-asserting surplus energy into useful channels. By doing so, the church is providing the proper conditions, so that, when the RELIGIOUS INSTINCT fully ripens, it will naturally form itself into the proper HABITS.

It has sometimes been questioned whether man is religious by INSTINCT. Some people will readily accept the statement that man is a moral and a social being by INSTINCT, but they balk at the RELIGIOUS INSTINCT. Wherein lies the difference? Is not morality and sociability some manifestation of religion put into actual life?

If two children could be placed upon some island all to themselves and would survive, they would develope some sort of a language between them, they would learn how to walk, run, and secure food. They would likewise develope some systems of morals, tho it may be crude; for example:- 'It is not right for me to steal the fish from Ta-Umm-Wha, because he has been up to his waist all day, trying to catch one with his hands. I would not want him to steal it if it were mine'.. The SOCIAL INSTINCTS would very noticibly manifest themselves, for the human beings would learn how to love and sympathize, howto live peacefully together and to share what little they may have in common. In a similar way the RELIGIOUS INSTINCT is bound to assert itself. Their sense of dependence would coerce them to seek the favor of the GREAT SUPREME CAUSE, that gives the sunshine and the rain, that causes the herbs and fruit to grow, and that causes the birds, the fishes, and even man himself, to exist.

Archdeacon Stuck of Alaska remarked in Trinity Church, Boston, a few weeks ago, that if any man were discovered, in whom the Religious INSTINCT had not manifested itself in some form, scientists would hesitate to classify such a one among the higher animals, the same as if he could not talk or manifest some other sign of reason. This

statement is probably not far from the absolute truth. At any rate, man IS religious by INSTINCT, and the church, in order to fulfil its mission, must be alert to direct REVERENCE, OBEDIENCE, FAITHFULNESS, LOVE, ALTRUISM, SYMPATHY and all the other HIGHER INSTINCTS into the formation of useful HABITS.

Statistics show that the RELIGIOUS INSTINCT is most keen between the ages of seventeen and twenty, during which time the most conversions and decisions for CHRIST are made. The church should not lose the opportunity of providing the appropriate conditions, so that when this phenomenal period of religious awakening arrives, that religious fervour may not be suppressed, but translated into good active CHRISTIANITY.

Man is indeed properly called "a bunch of HABITS", and he may just as easily be a good and useful bunch as a bad one. With all our recent knowledge thrown upon human conduct thru the MODERN SCIENCES, and with all our new light thrown upon the BIBLE, making it the WORD OF GOD applicable to everyday life, there is no reason why the individual and the community cannot be made sons of GOD by the regulation and control of INSTINCTS and HABITS thru proper ENVIROMENT and INSTRUCTION. The sooner we do this, the sooner will our prayer be answered:-

"THY KINGDOM COME ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"