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CAN WILL POWER BE TRAINED?

by
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As soon I began to pursue seriously the study of the phenomena of mental activity by the methods of psycho-physical research, I became aware that the usual definitions of "will" were not only incomplete, but largely inaccurate. In order to define more clearly what I mean by will-training, it will be necessary to briefly allude to five of the general classes of functions into which mental phenomena may be divided. I do not intend this for a complete classification, but only sufficient to explain the precise nature of that kind of volition about which I expect to talk in this paper. In the first place, we have intellectual functions, such as sensing, imaging, conceptuating, ideating, thinking, with their concomitant reasoning processes, and introspection. It is the province of the intellect to know. In the second place, we have emotional functions, such as the tender emotions, the ethical emotions, the religious emotions, the logical emotions, etc. It is the province of emotion to feel the beauty, the utility, and the practical relations of external conditions and internal knowledge to oneself. Thirdly, we have subconscious functions; and fourthly, we have organic sensations; and so on.

These four kinds of mental functions, namely, organic feelings, subconscious processes, intellection, and emotion, vary with different individuals in the same race and with different races of people, etc.; and these peculiarities constitute the basis of choice. In addition to these four classes of functions, there is a fifth, namely, volition; —but volition is not choice. It is not a matter of volition that I like this or dislike that; according to the character of the four processes first mentioned, we may choose one course of action in preference to another, and, when we attempt to carry out the chosen course of action, we still have to will it, and a series of separate volitions is required to carry out the act which we have willed. Thus, if I will myself to close the window to prevent a draft of cold air from striking me, I must carry out my act by a series of separate volitions connected with the various muscular movements necessary to that conation or act. I wish to make it plain, from the experimental standpoint, that it is not the province of the will to choose. I have found, after an accurate study of the whole question of predilection, choice, like and dislike, that intellective and emotive elements are invariably the basis of choice. The motive which finally determines the choice of any

given act or thing in preference to another does not involve direct volitional elements, but rises out of personal idiosyncrasies, education, and inherited or acquired character.

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Having chosen a course of conduct or a given act or deed, the performance of it, according to one's knowledge and feeling, requires, as I said before; not merely a series of separate volitions,—which volitions maybe quickly or slowly performed,—but it demands an intellectual and emotional determination to urge on the carrying out of this act. During a difficult series of volitions, we may, for emotional or intellectual reasons, cease to will the further performance of the act, and then, of course, the volitions are stopped.

I hope I have sufficiently explained that volition is not intellection; it is not emotion, it is not organic feeling, and, finally, it is not the power to choose. Out of the truth which we intellectually know; out of the beauty and justice which we emotionally feel; out of our inherited and acquired subconscious and organic processes, arises the particular choice which constitutes at any time the motive for any given will-act. The will-act contains intellective and emotive factors, but the volitions do not; we cannot will the truth to be different from what it is; we cannot will to like what we dislike by nature; we cannot will ourselves to accept a weaker motive for a stronger one; but, when a given act has been selected, then we can will that act, and the deed will be good or evil, according as our knowledge has been truthful or our emotions normal and our motives ethical. Will-training is an intellectual, emotional, social, and moral problem; while volition-training is a different and special problem.

I intellectually and emotionally choose to perform an act, and these elements constitute the motive; then I will the act and consciously direct the many separate volitions required to perform that act. If I repeatedly perform that act, the volitions become subconscious and automatic. These volitions may be slow and inaccurate, or quick and skillful, and so they remain when they become automatic,—hence the importance of a special training at the start.

Then there is another aspect of the problem of will-training. Most people act out only their motives of interest,—they are controlled almost wholly by likes and dislikes,—love and hate, —questions of profit and loss, pleasure and pain, etc. They choose only those acts and things which profit and please. Such people are automatons; they must be urged by emotional bribes to do good. On the other hand, there is an increasing number of people

who are able, more and more often, to will that which is true and just, irrespective of its effect upon themselves. They will truth, justice, and universal love, because it is right to do so,—and there are times in the lives of such people when they will that which is just and true when they know it will injure them (temporarily, at least,) to do so. Now, I have this word of cheer for my fellow men and women,—all persons can be trained to will the truth, more and more, and with less and less distortion by selfish interests.

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I have been asked to state what I consider to be the most important elements in the attainment of my own success. In the first place, beyond all other factors in importance, I consider as foremost the knowledge which I have of my own mind. It is the mind which makes every discovery, every invention, which originates every new idea, which formulates every plan, which directs every series of volitions, which acquires all knowledge. Therefore, a knowledge of the mind and the application of this knowledge to the art of better using the mind I consider to have been the chief element in my success. I began my scientific life with the discovery of psychurgy, or the art of mentation, which is the art of more efficiently using the mind. I believe that to give an individual more mind, and teach him how to use it better, is to fundamentally aid him in whatever he may undertake, whether it be the acquisition of education, or right living in a moral sense, or discovery and invention, or in social affairs.

The second factor of my success I believe to have been the possession of more or less extensive and accurate knowledge of my own profession, which is that of a scientific investigator, by experimental methods, of the phenomena of mind, in the broadest sense, and the application of psychologic discoveries to the art of using the mind. This profession necessarily involved as extensive an acquaintance with the sciences as I could get, because these sciences have been created by the mind, are mental products, and are kinds of mental experience.

The third factor, if I am permitted to judge, I believe to have been the very paramount attempt to formulate my plans with reference to the ideals of truth, justice, and universal love; because these ideals are so far beyond my present capacity that I can do no more than persistently modify and correct my plans by these standards; but, nevertheless, my studies and my experience have led me to a deep conviction that no real success can be obtained that is based upon selfish motives, and that no line of conduct can ultimately succeed unless it involves the elements of truth and justice.

The fourth element of success I consider to be the ability to work while I work, and sleep while I sleep: the avoidance of over-activity for any great length of time along any one intellectual, emotional, or volitional line, by doing systematic work along many lines, has preserved my working powers. Specialists over-use certain functions of their brains, and thereby weaken them. Only by regularly varying the mental activities so as to permit one set of functions to rest while others are in use can the best mental energies be utilized.

The fifth element of my success I believe to be the aid and confidence of friends. As far as I have been able to judge, no success involving public considerations can come except through the intermediation of friends. Therefore, the social proclivities and functions should form one subject in the curriculum of the training of the young. With a few exceptions here and there, pupils are trained in every general function except the social; except the power to win and keep friends. At critical periods in my life, strong and true friends,—God bless them!—always came to my assistance.

The sixth element of my success has been unswerving persistence,—I have done naught else, day or night, for over a quarter of a century, but work, study, read, experiment, and introspect along the lines of my life-work,—the science of mind and the art of mentation.

Briefly, the object of thus studying the mind in the most comprehensive and thorough way by experimental methods is to get all accurate facts relating thereto, in order to utilize them in the formulation of an art for the better using of the mind. By using the mind, I mean not merely all such voluntary acts as eating, sleeping, dressing, conversing; not merely the attainment of an education and training of the moral nature; not merely invention and discovery, but also more largely those ethical relations which, when properly performed, alone conduce to great success. We can have no knowledge, except such as comes to our consciousness; that is, we can only know the mind and its experiences. The mind may have experiences with itself, which is introspective psychology; it may have experiences with other selves, which is biology; it may have experiences with matter, which is chemistry; it may have experiences with motion, which is physics; it may have experiences with magnitudes, which is mathematics; it may have experiences with time-relations, which is history and evolution; it can have no other kind of experiences. In order to study the mind, it has been necessary for me to study, as far as it is possible for one man, all these subjects; that is, all the sciences and arts, as modes and products of mentation.

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Out of this knowledge have arisen, step by step, contributions toward a newer and better art of education, invention, discovery and right living. This institution aims to carry on researches along all these lines; to diffuse such knowledge among all peoples; to attack no belief, system, or creed; to train investigators in order that they may devote their lives to the ascertainment of truth. One important step in this work consists in re-observing the phenomena of the sciences. Observations have largely been inaccurate; have been biased by personal likes and dislikes; only one or two of the five senses have usually contributed to these observations; theory and hypothesis have largely dominated the course of discovery, and it is my purpose now to assemble, in classificatory form and the briefest possible space without theory and hypothesis, the inductively ascertainable facts of the sciences, in order that we may use them in the better training of investigators in the art of mentation.

We have no guidance but truth, and we know of no truth except knowledge. When the art of better using the mind has been learned by a sufficient number of assistants, so that each department can have a trained mentator at the head of it, this institution will be bequeathed, in fee simple, to such mentators as trustees, who are to carry out the enterprise according to the principles of the art of mentation, which it will be their purpose ever to extend and improve.

Yes, I pursue invention during spare hours, to illustrate, by actual cases, the principles of the art of mentation as applied to invention. I keep a minute record of every bodily, environmental, and psychologic detail during such an inventive period, and my interest is not in the money-value of the inventions, but in the steps by which I achieve them. But I have had no time to devote to the commercial introduction of inventions.