

## The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind

Gustave Le Bon (1895)

[Comments in brackets.]

**iii** “A man of science bent on verifying a phenomenon is not called upon to concern himself with the interests his verifications may hurt.” [My situation: 45 years ago, antibiotics registered to my physiology as a destructive product or falsehood... in looking into whether or not there is a substantial basis for verifying that physiological & psychological effect, I have produced the Truth Centre.]

“To belong to a school is necessarily to espouse its prejudices and preconceived opinions.” [Note: Tom Barnett]

**iv** “... nothing is more fatal to a people than the mania for great reforms, however excellent these reforms may appear theoretically. They would only be useful were it possible to change instantaneously the genius of nations. This power, however, is only possessed by time.”

“The study of social phenomena cannot be separated from that of the peoples among whom they have come into existence.” [We are now in unique times.]

**vi** “The part played by the unconscious in all our acts is immense, and that played by reason very small.”

“Every conclusion drawn from our observation is, as a rule, premature, for behind the phenomena which we see clearly are other phenomena, and perhaps behind these, yet others which we do not see at all.”

**xii** “The masses repudiate today the gods which their admonishers repudiated yesterday and helped to destroy. There is no power, divine or human, that can oblige a stream to flow back from its source.”

“Science promised us truth... sovereignly indifferent to our feelings, it is deaf to our lamentations.”

**xiii** “Crowds are only powerful for destruction...” (Incapable of advanced concepts.) [Maybe a different situation today, due to advanced levels of collective human consciousness – as we are currently witnessing.]

**xiv** “It is only by obtaining some sort of insight into the psychology of crowds that it can be understood how slight is the action upon them of laws & institutions, how powerless they are to hold any opinions other than those which are opposed on them...”

**xv** “... men never shape their conduct upon the teaching of pure reason.”

2 “It forms a single being, and is subjected to the law of the mental unity of crowds.”

5 “The conscious life of the mind is of small importance in comparison with its unconscious life... The greater part of our daily actions are the result of hidden motives which escape our observation.”

“Men the most unlike in the matter of their intelligence possess instincts, passions and feelings that are very similar.”

6 “... The heterogenous is swamped by the homogenous, and the unconscious qualities obtain the upper hand.”

“**This** very fact that crowds possess, in common, ordinary qualities explains why they can never accomplish acts demanding a high degree of intelligence... (great paragraph)... the decisions affecting matters of general interest come to by an assembly of men of distinction, but specialists in different walks of life, are not sensibly superior to the decisions that would be adopted by a gathering of imbeciles...”

Causes of crowd characteristics -

- 1) ... acquires a sentiment of invincible power... loses responsibility... (the individual in a crowd)
- 2) contagion (hypnotic order) - every sentiment and act are contagious
- 3) most important by far - individuals of a crowd display certain characteristics which are quite contrary at times to those presented by an isolated individual.

7 “... Under the influence of a suggestion, he will undertake the accomplishment of certain acts with irresistible impetuosity.” (worse for crowds than in hypnotism)

8 “He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will.” [the medical establishment?]

“**Moreover**, by the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization...”

9 “The crowd may... be better or worse than the individual. All depends on the nature of the suggestion to which the crowd is exposed...” [Love]

“**Such** heroism is without doubt somewhat unconscious, but it is of such heroism that history is made.”

10 “... impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgment and of critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments...”

11 “... The isolated individual possesses the capacity of dominating his reflex actions, while a crowd is devoid of this capacity.”

14 Suggestibility leads to contagion... also credulity.

“The first suggestion formulated which arises implants itself immediately by a process of contagion in the brains of all assembled, and the identical bent of the sentiments...”

[The ‘class distinction’ of women references (for the time) – pgs. 10, 19, 22]

17 The ease of which it is to deceive crowds – Mr. Davey example

19 Children/“magistrates”/lying... “Magistrates are in the habit of repeating that children do not lie...”

“... the faculty of observation possessed by crowds, our conclusion is that their collective observations are as erroneous as possible...” (applies to juries) [Aligns with Hawkins’ appraisal.]

**20** “It clearly results from what proceeds that works of history must be considered as works of pure imagination.” [the whole paragraph is amazing]

**21** “... and the Buddha worshipped in China has no traits in common with that venerated in India.”

“**In** our own day we have seen the legend of one of the greatest heroes of history modified several times in less than 50 years.”

“... **they** will know that history is scarcely capable of preserving the memory of anything except myths.”

22 “Still, this does not mean that crowds, skillfully influenced, are not capable of heroism and devotion and of evincing the loftiest virtues...”

23 “An orator wishing to move a crowd must make an abusive use of violent affirmations...”

24 “Crowds are only cognizant of simple and extreme sentiments.” – either accepted or rejected as a whole

26 Le Bon suggests that crowd mentality (democracies) are a hold back to the progress of society.

**36** “The power of conquerors and the strength of states is based on the popular imagination... moreover, all the great statemen of every age and every country, including the most absolute despots, have regarded the popular imagination as the basis of their power, and they have never attempted to govern in opposition to it.” Further...

37 “To know the art of impressing the imagination of crowds is to know at the same time the art of governing them.”

39 “Intolerance and fanaticism are the necessary accompaniments of the religious sentiment.”

42 “At the bottom of such events (massacres) is always to be found the working of the soul of the masses and never the power of potentates.”

47 “It has been justly observed that an ant with enough time at its disposal could level Mont Blanc.”

48 “Time, with no other aid, will see to the restoration of equilibrium.”  
[Additional is the Universal Law declaration, “The seeds of destruction...”]

**53** “**The** primary danger of this system of education – very properly qualified as Latin – consists in the fact that it is based on the fundamental psychological error that the intelligence is developed by the learning by the heart of text books.”

“**From** primary school till he leaves the university a young man does nothing but acquire books by heart without his judgment or personal initiative being ever called into play. Education consists for him in reciting by heart and obeying.” [Note: this assertion put forth in 1895!]

“**Learning**, lessons, knowing by heart a grammar or a compendium, repeating well and imitating well – that,” writes a former Minister of Public Instruction, M. Jules Simon, “is a ludicrous form of education whose every effort is an act of faith tacitly admitting the infallibility of the master, and whose only results are a belittling of ourselves and a rendering of us impotent.”

**54** “The acquisition of knowledge for which no use can be found is a sure method of driving a man to revolt...”

**55** “The conditions of success in life are the possession of judgment, experience, initiative and character – qualities which are not bestowed by books.”

**56** “How is it possible for “professional” instruction to develop the intelligence in a measure quite beyond the reach of classical instruction?”  
[“Classical instruction” may have been remembered in Le Bon’s time, but I would think that we have no definition of it today. The same goes for Bechamp’s term, “Old Medicine”.]

Excellent 2 pages with input from M. Taine - <1895!!

58 France (decline of education noted as of 1789) vs. China comparison.

Also England & America p. 57

60 “It is in the schoolroom that socialists & anarchists are found nowadays, and that the way is being paved for the approaching period of decadence for the Latin peoples.”

**67** “... **but** as they must have their illusions (the masses) at all cost, they turn instinctively, as the insects seeks light, to the rhetoricians who accord

them what they want. Not **truth**, but **error** has always been the chief factor in the evolution of nations...”

“**The** masses have never thirsted after truth. They turn aside from evidence that is not to their taste, preferring to deify error, if error seduce them. Whoever can supply them with illusions is easily their master; whoever attempts to destroy their illusions is always their victim.” [Antithesis: *Populus vult decipi... ergo decipiatur.*]

“**Experience** constitutes almost the only effective process by which a truth may be solidly established in the mind of the masses, and illusions grown too dangerous be destroyed. To this end, however, it is necessary that the experience should take place on a very large scale, and be very frequently *repeated*. The experiences undergone by one generation are *useless*, as a rule, for the generation that follows, which is the reason why historical facts, cited with a view to demonstration, serve no purpose. Their only utility is to prove to what an extent experiences need to be repeated from age to age to exert any influence, or to be successful in merely shaking an erroneous opinion when it is solidly implanted in the mind of the masses.”

69 “We have already shown that crowds are not to be influenced by reasoning... the orators who know how to make an impression upon them always appeal in consequence to their sentiments and never to their reason. The laws of logic have *no action* on crowds...”

70 “It is not even necessary to descend so low as primitive beings to obtain an insight into the utter powerlessness of reasoning when it has to fight against sentiment. Let us merely call to mind how tenacious, for centuries long, have been religious superstitions in contradiction with the simplest logic.”

71 “Let us leave reason, then, to philosophers, and not insist too strongly on its intervention in the governing of men. It is not by reason, but most often in spite of it, that are created those sentiments that are the mainsprings of all civilization – sentiments such as honor, self-sacrifice, religious faith, patriotism and the love of glory.”

72 Chap. III – The Leaders of Crowds and Their Means of Persuasion

“As soon as a certain number of living beings are gathered together, whether they be animals or men, they place themselves instinctively under the authority of a chief.”

“A crowd is a servile flock that is incapable of ever doing without a master.” [Subsequent to this 1895 assertion, an update is required, in that the Hungarian Revolution (1956) was undertaken/fully developed within 24 hours *without* organized leadership. Again, a reflection of elevating collective human consciousness.]

73 “Men gathered in a crowd lose all force of will, and turn instinctively to the person who possesses the quality they lack.” [Again, see above comment.]

(Leaders as rhetoricians) - “The influence they can assert in this manner may be very great but it is always ephemeral.”

Arousing faith in crowds... “... **has** always been the function of the great leaders of crowds.”

74 “In every social sphere, from the highest to the lowest, as soon as man ceases to be isolated, he speedily falls under the influence of a leader.”

**77** “**The** means of action of the leaders: Affirmation, Repetition, Contagion.”

“**Affirmation**, pure & simple, kept free of all reasoning, and all proof, is one of the surest means of making an idea enter the minds of crowds.”

“Affirmation, however, has no real influence unless it be constantly repeated, and so far as possible, in the same terms.”

“The thing affirmed to fix itself in the mind in such a way that it is accepted in the end as a demonstrated truth.” [A fake pathogen, for instance.]

78 “Affirmation & repetition are alone powerful enough to combat each other.”

“Ideas, sentiments, emotions and beliefs possess in crowds a contagious power as intense as that of microbes.” [Interesting claim given the current times.]

“In the case of men collected in a crowd all emotions are very rapidly contagious...”

**79** “**Imitation**... is a mere effect of contagion... whether in the matter of opinions, ideas, literary manifestations, or merely of dress, how many persons are bold enough to run counter to the fashion? It is by examples not by arguments that crowds are guided...”

“**It** is needful, however, that these individualities should not be in too pronounced disagreement with received ideas... for this very reason men who are too superior to their epoch are generally without influence upon it...”

“*L’Homme et les Societes*” - Gustave Le Bon

**80** “The opinions and beliefs of crowds are specially propagated by contagion, but never by reasoning.”

“Contagion is so powerful a force that even the sentiment of personal interest disappears under its action.”

**81** “Great power is given to ideas propagated by Affirmation, Repetition & Contagion by the circumstance that they acquire in time that mysterious force known as prestige.”

“Prestige, in reality is a sort of domination exercised on our mind by an individual, a work, or an idea. This domination entirely paralyzes our *critical faculty*, and fills our soul with astonishment and respect.”

2 kinds of prestige – Acquired (artificial) and Personal.

“**Prestige** is the mainspring of all authority. Neither gods, kings nor women have ever reigned without it.”

**83** “The special characteristic of prestige is to prevent us seeing things as they are and to entirely paralyze our judgment... the popularity of these opinions is independent of the measure of truth or error they contain, and is solely regulated by their prestige.”

**84** M. Taine’s account of the “personal prestige” of N. Bonaparte

General VanDamme’s personal account of Napoleon (1815) – “That devil of a man exercises a fascination on me that I cannot explain even to myself, and in such a degree that, though I fear neither God nor devil, when I am in his presence I am ready to tremble like a child, and he could make me go through the eye of a needle to throw myself into the fire.”

**86** “... all is permitted if you possess prestige in a sufficient degree and talent necessary to uphold it.” [Dostoyevsky – “Where there is no God... all is permitted.”]

**89** “From the moment prestige is called into question it ceases to be prestige. The gods and men who have kept their prestige for long have never tolerated discussion. For the crowd to admire, it must be kept at a distance.”

**91** “The beginning of a revolution is in reality the end of a belief. The precise moment at which a great belief is doomed is easily recognizable; it is the moment when its value begins to be called into question. Every general belief being little else than a fiction, it can only survive on the condition that it be not subjected to examination... But even when a belief is severely shaken, the institutions to which it has given rise retain their strength and disappear but slowly...”

**92** “**There** are great difficulties in the way of establishing a general belief, but when it is definitely implanted its power is for a long time to come invincible, and however false it be, philosophically it imposes itself upon the most luminous intelligence.”

“**The** frightful absurdity of the legend of a God who revenges himself for the disobedience of one of his creatures by inflicting horrible tortures on his



son remained unperceived during many centuries. Such potent geniuses as a Galileo, a Newton and a Leibnitz never supposed for an instant that the truth of such dogmas could be called in question. Nothing can be more typical than this fact of the hypnotizing effect of general beliefs, but at the same time nothing can mark more decisively the humiliating limitations of our intelligence.”

“Thus it is that, thanks to general beliefs, the men of every age are enveloped in a network of traditions, opinions and customs which render them all alike, and from whose yoke they cannot extricate themselves. Men are guided in their conduct above all by their beliefs and by the customs that are the consequence of those beliefs... The tyranny exercised unconsciously on men’s minds is the only real tyranny, because it cannot be fought against... A conspiracy may overthrow a tyrant, but what can it avail against a firmly established belief?... The only real tyrants that humanity has known have always been the memories of its dead or the illusions it has forged itself.”

93 “The philosophic absurdity that often marks general beliefs has never been an obstacle to their triumph. Indeed, the triumph of such beliefs would seem impossible unless on the condition that they offer some mysterious absurdity. In consequence, the evident weakness of the socialist beliefs of today will not prevent them triumphing among the masses...”

95 “... the changeable opinions of crowds are greater in number than they ever were, and for 3 reasons:” 1) old beliefs losing influence, 2) power of crowds on the increase, 3) recent [as of 1895] development of the newspaper press... [Obviously #3) is modifiable and complicated when referring to present time - i.e. the integrity of the press, etc..]

97 “... the press has renounced all endeavor to enforce an idea or a doctrine.” [My, how things have changed!]

98 “... they prove too how little of the *critical spirit* is developed by the system of university education in vogue in France.” [1895!!!] Further...

99 “Could anything postpone for a while the hour of its ruin (civilization), it would be precisely the extreme instability of the opinions of crowds and their growing indifference with respect to all general beliefs.”

103 Homogenous crowds - the sect, the caste & the class.

110 “Like all crowds, juries are very strongly impressed by sentimental considerations, and very slightly by argument.” [The implications here cannot be understated, and are supported by Hawkins’ assertion that 50% of all witness testimony are wrong.]



115 “Of the characteristics peculiar to crowds, they (electoral crowds) display in particular but slight aptitude for reasoning, *the absence of critical spirit*, irritability, credulity and simplicity.”

“Personal prestige can only be replaced by that resulting from wealth. Talen and even genius are not elements of success of serious importance.”

**128** “It will always be easy to make a crowd accept general assertions, presented striking terms, although they have never been verified, and are perhaps not susceptible of verification.”

**129** “It is all to the interest of the leaders to indulge in the most improbable exaggerations...”

“**On** occasion, the leader may be intelligent and highly educated, but the possession of these qualities does him, as a rule, more harm than good. By showing how complex things are, by allowing of explanation and promoting comprehension, intelligence always renders its owner indulgent, and blunts, in a large measure, that intensity and violence of conviction needful of apostles. The great leaders of crowds of all ages... have been of lamentably narrow intelligence...”

130 “It is terrible at times to think of the power that strong conviction with extreme narrowness of mind gives a man possessing prestige... Crowds instinctively recognize in men of energy and conviction the masters they are always in need of.”

“In a parliamentary assembly the success of a speech depends almost solely on the prestige possessed by the speaker, and not at all on the arguments he brings forward...”

133 “The work of a crowd is always inferior, whatever its nature, to that of an isolated individual.”

135 “Herbert Spencer has shown... That the increase in apparent liberty must needs be followed by the increase of real liberty.”

**136** “This incessant creation of restrictive laws & regulations... victims of the delusion that equality and liberty are the better assured by the multiplication of laws...”

137 “This progressive restriction of all liberties in the case of certain peoples...”

138 The birth of a new civilization - “... with perfect unity of sentiment and thought.”

139 And the decline of this new civilization by loss of its ideal - “... this collective egoism of the race is replaced by an excessive development of the egoism of the individual...”

“With the definite loss of its old ideal the genius of the race entirely disappears ...”

“... Such is the cycle of the life of a people.”

[The last 3 entries summarize the rise and fall of a civilization, noting that the strength of a civilization is in the genius of its race. While the cycling through the steps of an evolving civilization has come to destruction in the end, as noted by Le Bon, there are a couple of pertinent details that we can compare with the current times:

- 1) It is singularly by the allegiance to falsehood (through propagandized manipulation & the individual’s complacent abandonment of morality, ethics & critical thought) that has brought about the somewhat disturbing (on the surface) conditions that we have before us today (2022). It was always going to come to this, and it also happens to follow the adage, “The seeds of destruction are contained in every evil thought, word or deed.”
- 2) In current times, with principles such as 1) in mind, human collective evolution has advanced enough, that we may depart from the atrocities of history, as well as the astute observations of folks like Gustave Le Bon with his reference to the typical rise & fall of civilizations. The documented evidence of the transitional condition of an inhabited planet, known as being “Settled in Light & Life”, displays the formal terminology, that is before us now.]

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