tures and to redirect his own actions with reference to the imagined effect of his gestures on other persons. On the basis of such significant gestures a general universe of discourse is built up. Self-consciousness arises when a person acquires a generalized picture of the response of others to his own gestures and an image of himself as he appears to others. This self is social, somewhat unstable, and necessary to human cooperative life.

Just as a person makes a generality out of others' responses to his own actions, so does he generalize on the other persons. The "generalized other" becomes the basis of conscience and the most general social attitudes. The social organiza ion thus penetrates most deeply into human nature. It does not lay a veneer over the surface but forms a most essential part of the person. It never completely eliminates individuality, however, for Mead holds that there is always an impulsive, active, nonreflective "I" which differentiates each person and brings novelty into social life.

A hundred pages are a tight space to devote to such an original philosopher, and concentration is required to follow the thought. It is recognized that only a thorough and sympathetic reading of Mead's principal works could make the foregoing statements completely meaningful to one unfamiliar with this theory. After that has been done, the unity may be readily grasped by a study of the present excellent interpretation by Grace Chin Lee. Further inquiry is made convenient by a complete bibliography of writings by and about Mead.

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The Psychology of Rumor. By GORDON W. ALLPORT and LEO POSTMAN. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1947. Pp. xiv+247. $2.60.

Just as the experiences of World War I led to a more systematic study of propaganda, the concern over some of the alleged techniques of Nazi propagandists has led to an increased interest in the investigation of rumor. However, there are probably fewer than a dozen books on the subject, only a few of which are available in English, and the periodical literature is widely scattered. The authors declare that it was the lack of a "systematic treatment" of rumor that prompted them to write this "basic textbook." As a textbook, the volume is apropos and welcome and undoubtedly will be widely used. As a systematic treatise on rumor, however, it unfortunately suffers from several shortcomings.

The authors begin by defining rumor as "a specific (or topical) proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by word of mouth, without secure standards of evidence being present." In the course of their work, however, they occasionally wander from this definition. Many previous students have conceived of rumor primarily as a process of distortion and have consequently been preoccupied with the problem of accounting for modifications in the content of reports in the course of their transmission. It appears that at times the authors have followed this practice. Thus, when they refer to the "rumor principle" as having a "widespread applicability," when they write of the "characteristic course of distortion," and when they speak of a "visual rumor" (p. 58), the identification of "rumor" and "distortion" is implied. Furthermore, five out of the ten chapters in the book are devoted to an analysis of distortion.

Although a somewhat different approach is used in chapter ix, "Rumor in Society," the authors attempt to analyze the phenomenon of rumor in terms of individual psychology. Thus, while they declare repeatedly that rumor is a *social* phenomenon, they insist that since rumors are transmitted serially, the individual links in the chain are important. Accordingly, in attempting to account for the acceptance and spread of reports in the absence of "secure standards of evidence," they present the theory of the "threefold dynamic." Rumors spread because they provide the individual with an opportunity (1) to relieve emotional tensions, (2) to justify the existence of emotions, and (3) to make the situation confronting him more meaningful. On these points, the authors have followed the work of a number of previous students of rumor.

In their study of distortion, the authors have again turned to the analysis of the individual link. The central concepts used are grouped into the "three-pronged process" which reflects what F. C. Bartlett has called the "effort after meaning." The concepts are (1) *sharpening*, or the selective perception, retention, and reporting of a limited number of details from a larger context, (2) *leveling*, or the selective omission of details, and (3) *assimilation*, or the distortion to make a "more coherent, consistent mental configuration." A considerable body of experimental data is presented, including the results obtained from

administering identical material to those in different universes of discourse, showing nicely the manner in which different interests lead to differences in report.

One portion of the work that may attract considerable attention is what the authors call the "basic law of rumor": $R \sim i \times a$, a formula which is interpreted "the amount of rumor in circulation will vary with the importance of the subject to the individuals concerned *times* the ambiguity of the evidence pertaining to the topic at issue." Aside from the questionable use of precise mathematical symbols where the referents are so ambiguous, there are other difficulties. Although the authors refer to the formula as an expression of a "law," there is no systematic presentation of evidence in its demonstration. Attempts are made to indicate how the formula might apply to a few cases, but it appears from these that the i (importance) and the a (ambiguity) are nothing more than the necessary, although not sufficient, *conditions* for the spread of rumors. Nowhere in the volume is there any evidence to indicate that the "amount of rumor in circulation" varies in the mechanical, mathematical relationship designated in the formula.

The use of the mathematical formula and of terms such as "laboratory conditions," "basic law," and "dynamics" appears to the reviewer pretentious and misleading. It gives the impression that the entire work was done in strict adherence to the canons of natural science. Yet, except in connection with the propositions about distortion, the hypotheses presented, although quite plausible, are not backed by conclusive evidence. The adoption of such terminology rather than the frank admission of the difficulties faced in the social sciences may invite the disdain of mathematicians and other scientists rather than alleviate the situation that originally gave rise to the charges that students of social life were not "scientific."

Very few of the propositions about rumor are original with the authors. As is the case in most textbooks, this volume is made up of a collection and organization of propositions presented by previous students. An examination of the original sources will reveal that on the whole these propositions are largely inductions from daily experience rather than the results of a careful examination of data. The value of this volume lies in bringing together the ideas that hitherto have been scattered in obscure sources, some of which are inaccessible in all but a few outstanding libraries.

Appended to the work is a bibliography which will be of considerable value to those interested in the further study of rumor. It is unfortunate, however, that the authors have omitted helpful sources such as the second half of L. A. Bysow's excellent article and the studies of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, Albert Dauzat, Lucien Graux, Bernard Hart, Carl Jung, Richard Loewenberg, Charles Oman, J. Prasad, and Walter Schöne—some of which are superior to the references listed.

Rumor is a social phenomenon for reasons other than the simple fact that more than one person is involved in its transmission. Indeed, in the interpretation of their data the authors have referred repeatedly to the extent to which the content of reports is affected by group definitions. Nevertheless, after pointing to the differences between "everyday rumor" and the reports used in their experiments, after stating the limitations carefully, the authors sweep them aside as inconsequential and declare that their findings apply to rumors in daily life. But it is difficult to see how rumors can be studied in isolation from the social situations in which they flourish, for they gain their character in the interaction between persons. Since rumors do not emerge in a vacuum, it is not possible to understand them without a detailed knowledge of the setting in which they emerge. Rumors can probably be studied more profitably in terms of the condition of experience of the people among whom they spread than in terms of what is intrinsic in the reports themselves. The method employed by the authors may be the best way to study the distortion of testimony, but it is by no means the only way to study rumor.

In our rapidly changing industrial civilization, where the individual is confronted with the necessity of taking a position toward a multitude of objects about which there is little opportunity for gaining directly experienced knowledge, it is inevitable that men would have to depend upon unreliable reports. It is indeed a lamentable commentary on social science that a topic of such obvious importance has been so sadly neglected. Despite its shortcomings, this volume is probably the most comprehensive and best single work on rumor now available But what is needed is more field research—empirical data with which the multitude of theories, some with brilliant insights, may be tested.

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