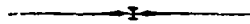


M I N D

A QUARTERLY REVIEW

OF

PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY.

I.—IS THERE ANY SPECIAL ACTIVITY OF
ATTENTION ?

By F. H. BRADLEY.

THE question I have placed at the head of this article may serve to define its subject-matter. Is Attention, so far as it is *psychical* activity, an original element, and is there any specific function of attention? The strict result of the English analytical school would give a negative answer to both these questions. With that denial I agree, and I have not been able to find sufficient reason to doubt its truth. Active attention is not primary, either as being there from the first or as supervening, but is a derivative product. Nor again, I should add, is there any one special activity at all, but various activities, if they lead to one result, are called attending. This is the doctrine which the paper is written to defend, or rather to press upon the reader's notice. The whole subject is so difficult and is so implicated with other branches of psychology, that to treat of it fully is not possible here, even if in my case it were possible anywhere. My chief object is to record a kind of protest. I observe a tendency to break up the life of the soul, to divide it into active and passive factors, or to suppose a passive beginning with a supervening activity, the latter by

some identified with an irreducible act of attention. I believe this tendency to be a serious obstacle to psychology, and there is another tendency not less injurious. Attention may be given such a position that the reader cannot tell if it is primary or derivative, or, if primary, whether it is an original element or something that supervenes; or, again, whether it is one of a class of activities, or itself a class of different activities, or one function exerted on different objects. And my purpose is first to ask why we should desert the conclusion that attention is a product; and, if we must desert it, to urge that the alternative should at least be stated distinctly. The attention I am to speak of is *active* attention.

Attention (whatever it may be besides) at any rate means predominance in consciousness. Some element or elements, sensational or ideal, become prominent from the rest and seem to lower them in strength, if they do not entirely exclude them from notice. That which we attend to is said to engross us. "The expression means that a sensation tends more or less strongly to exclude from consciousness all other sensations."¹ Not theorising but applying descriptive metaphors, we may call attention a state which implies domination or chief tenancy of consciousness. Or we may compare it to the focusing of an optical instrument, or to the area of distinct vision in the retinal field.² Now in active attention we produce this condition (there is no doubt of that), and the question is how we are able to do this, or what is the machinery which effects the production. In order to answer this question, we must first make a general survey of the facts.

A flash of lightning by night, the report of a firearm, the sudden prick of a knife, or a violent internal pain, all these for the moment so occupy our notice that everything else becomes feeble or is banished. I shall not ask *how* it is that these intruders prevail, whether there is one cause or various ones, and, if so, how they are related.³ Nor shall I enquire

¹ Abbreviated from J. S. Mill on James Mill's *Analysis of the Human Mind*, ii. 372.

² Hamilton, *Met.* i. 238, Lotze, *Med. Psych.* 505, and (later) Wundt, *Phys. Psych.* ii. 206. I may take this opportunity of saying that I have considered Wundt's doctrine of Apperception and am unable to adopt it, perhaps because I have failed to understand it.

³ There is mere strength, pleasure and pain, and habit, including under that head inherited predispositions as well as the attractions of familiarity and change. How these stand to one another is matter of controversy which does not concern us. Stumpf, *Tonpsych.* i. 71, is inclined to doubt

if we here can be said to attend or are active in any sense. I think no one would say that we ourselves *produced* the tyranny of these assailants. Let us then go on to the states where we are certainly somehow active. When the ears are erected or the eyes opened or moved, and these reflex acts increase the power of one sensation against other mental elements, I do not know if we properly are said to attend. And, though there is a kind of "activity," yet assuredly there is here no active attention. For no psychical activity at all is present, or in any case none which produces the dominance of one mental element. Still, if the reader objects, I will not at present insist. He will agree that these reflexes are but one amongst other sorts of attention, and I will therefore pass on.

We come next to a class where the activity is still muscular, a muscular activity exerted upon a percipient organ directly, or indirectly as by turning the body. But in addition we have here a preceding idea and (according to one view) a feeling which moves. A visible object for example suggests, indirectly or directly, ideas and feelings which lead to our fixing it, and that fixation makes the perception of the object predominant and steady. There are many stages in this class, and we shall all agree that in some of them we have an active attention. There is a question in fact whether attention is much *more*, and to that question we shall be obliged to return.

We come next to a number of cases of attention where muscular activity seems not essential. But in all of these an *idea* must be present and appears to operate. A simple

the fact of attention's always strengthening, partly on the ground that in that case it would falsify observation. But, in the first place, since strength of course is relative, the observed relation might for more than one reason remain unaltered. And, in the second place, there is a most important point to be considered, to which it seems to me that Stumpf has hardly done justice. This is the distinction between the strength of a perception as a psychical state and the strength which is perceived by means of the perception. If we consider ideas, it seems hopeless to contend that the idea (*e.g.*) of a strong or weak pleasure or pain must always itself be a strong or weak state of mind. Such an example as the tranquil recollection of a tooth-drawing would at once confute us. And if this is so with ideas, it will, I think, be so still when we come to perceptions. The difference between the state and its ideal content will hold good there also. It will be possible to have a perception of violence which itself is not violent, and of febleness which itself is not weak. The degree will be a character distinguishable from and contained in the whole state of perception, which latter may in some other way vary in strength while the degree remains the same. But how this can be possible is a most difficult question with which I do not feel myself at present competent to deal.

instance is the appearance in sensation or perception of an element not striking in itself but with which a dominant idea is associated. If an idea or a mass of ideas are so interesting that they are able to engross us, then the elements connected with them, whether sensible or ideal, may engross us also (cp. J. S. Mill, *loc. cit.*). Whether perceptions and ideas that attract us by their strangeness belong to this class I shall not enquire, nor for the present shall I ask what "interesting" means. What must engage us is the doubt if in this class we have everywhere *active* attention. When a thought, as we say, is much in our minds, and we dwell upon everything that suits with its presence and supports its rule, we do not know of any *act*, since all comes of itself. 'If I am active,' we should ask, 'what is it that I do?' and it is better therefore to go on to clearer instances. When I retain an idea or keep watch on an object, and still more when I investigate, I am supposed to act and also to attend, since my thoughts are confined to one main subject. But is this active attention? When for example at this moment I write about attention, I am active no doubt and I presume attending; but if you ask me whether I actively attend, I hesitate for an answer. For, if I am well and not distracted, attention seems of itself to wait upon my other activity, and, if it does not come because of it, seems to come spontaneously. It is otherwise where I have resolved to attend to some matter and still persevere. We have here the attention that proclaims itself active, and there is more than one variety. I may simply intend to occupy my mind with a certain subject, or may resolve in particular to be active upon it in such or such a manner.

Let us enumerate the results of the above survey. In the first place (1) we may have resolved to attend, or (2) to effect some mental operation which involves attention. We may also (3) perform the same act without intention or resolve, and again, where we are not conscious of action, (4) a dominant idea may lend its force to a connected element. Once more, (5) a muscular act, itself the result of idea (and perhaps feeling), may cause the predominance of sensation or idea; or (6) a sensation may be fixed by a simple reflex; or (7) lastly some element may predominate by what seems its own superior energy. The two last varieties, I think, must now be dismissed. They have of course great psychological importance, but it seems evident that they are not *active* attention.

I shall go on to attempt a clearance of the ground by dealing with the claim of muscular action; for if this contained the essence of active attention, our task would be

shortened. The "Will," it may be said, controls the voluntary muscles (and them alone), and the voluntary muscles by acting on the organs control sensation. And when we attend to an idea, and when the muscles do *not* move, yet the Will still controls. For in the idea attended to is "a muscular element," and this "mental, or revived, image occupies the same place in the brain and other parts of the system as the original sensation did" (Bain, *Emotions*, 370). Hence the Will is enabled to direct itself to the idea, and so to control it; and in this way the activity of attention is explained.

But this view will not bear an impartial scrutiny. I say nothing about the physiological hypothesis on which it seems to hang, and I will not ask whether, if the facts were as alleged, the explanation would be sufficient; for the facts are largely otherwise.¹ I attend to various visceral sensations, I attend to a single instrument in an orchestra, I attend to the several components of a smell, I attend to colour and not shape, and I attend in one colour, such as greenish-blue, to the blue or to the green; but it is needless to go on. There is according to the theory "a muscular intervention" in all these cases. And this cannot mean merely that in all there exists *some* "muscular element," for this (if true) would be perfectly *irrelevant*. The fact to be explained is my attending to A or B and not to C or D, and unless there are special "muscular elements" *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*, the fact is not explained. But, if such elements are everywhere postulated, then I think I may say that, when the physiologists and the anatomists have been converted, it will be time enough for the psychologist to enquire. On the other hand, if, as I presume, Prof. Bain makes no such postulate, then I am unable to see how the theory can touch the fact to be explained.

Active attention does not consist merely in muscular innervation, and, if so, we must go on to look elsewhere. But I should like to say first that it seems to me most doubtful if attention *must* have even a muscular concomitant. I do not deny that early in development this is so, and I do not deny that, if attention reaches a certain degree of strength, there is some muscular accompaniment, such as frowning. But in my actual experience, when I pass from inattention to a direction of my thoughts, I cannot verify the *universal* presence of a muscular element; and I know no good *a priori* proof of that presence. I should add that to me this question

¹ Cp. Lotze, *Med. Psych.* 509.

seems to be merely one of fact, and to have no other psychological importance.¹

We have now surveyed, and to some extent have cleared, our ground, and the best course will, I think, be rapidly to go through the rest of our cases, and to ask in each if we require a specific activity of attention. After this and in conclusion we will deal with some particular difficulties.

Let us first take the case where a sensation engrosses us, though not directly, and where yet we are not conscious of any activity. What operates here will be a connected idea; for the idea engrosses, and what goes with it will therefore engross us also. We, I presume, are all agreed that ideas and that groups of ideas may interest. In what interest consists is a difficult question. It is I think quite certain that it consists to a large extent in pleasure and pain, but that it always consists in nothing else, or that pleasure or pain *must* always be present, seem both to me improbable. But for the purpose of this article I shall assume that what interests does so by means of pleasure or pain. Then, if an idea is pleasing, that idea may engross us, and if an indifferent sensation suggests the idea, the idea on its side will affect the sensation and cause it to dominate (cp. J. S. Mill, *loc. cit.* 372). How it does so is again a question that opens a somewhat wide field. We must content ourselves with the answer that it works by redintegration and also by blending. It is blending when, if two mental elements have got the same content, the intensities of both are more or less combined with a total or partial fusion of the elements. I should say that this process cannot wholly be reduced to redintegration, and whether its existence is compatible with the strict principles of the English school of "association," I do not know. It of course presents some difficulties in general, and raises a number of interesting problems. But, without dwelling on these questions, we may lay down the result that, if an idea engrosses, then any sensation which is connected with that idea may in consequence engross. And attention so far has appeared to consist in interest, either direct or transferred; an account which, we shall find, will hold good everywhere (cp. Waitz, *Lehrbuch*, 634-7).

Let us pass on to the cases where we feel an activity. In

¹ Some psychologists appear to be so taken by the idea of our voluntary muscles that they seem at times to forget the existence of such things as glands and skin and mucous membranes. I would refer the reader specially to those chapters in Dr. Tuke's *Influence of the Mind upon the Body* which deal with the action of the intellect upon the involuntary muscles and the organic functions, or see Carpenter's *Mental Physiology*.

the first class of these we make no resolve, but, performing an operation, we are occupied with our performance. We are writing or reading, and the subject engrosses us. We, I presume, attend, and we certainly seem active, and the question is, What is such active attention, and does it simply once more consist in interest? I have no doubt that it does. The subject may predominate because of the activity, but the activity itself is produced by interest. Why am I active? Because the function of itself is interesting, or because the idea of the result is dominant. The main idea of the subject favours those activities which further its existence, and it lends them its strength. It naturally selects them. Or the idea of an answer to a question which interests creates uneasiness and a coming up and maintenance of any function which serves to relieve. The attention is caused by an indirect interest, for that produces the activity whose subject predominates.

There are some objections which, perhaps, before we go on, should be considered here. It may be said first (*a*) that no intellectual activity exists, and secondly (*b*) that the dominant idea could not work. The objections have perhaps not been made in this form, but it will serve to bring out the points of difficulty.

(*a*) If no intellectual activity exists, and if yet there is *some* activity present in intellectual functions, this activity, it would seem, might be attention. It is not possible for me here to discuss the question of intellectual activities, their existence and their origin, and I prefer to reply, If no activity of intellect then none whatever; for psychology deals simply with psychical processes. I shall return lower down to this general question, but here will assume that the intellect is active.¹ And if so, its activity upon a certain object will (as was said before) result from interest. The objection however may be pressed as follows. Let that be the case, it may be said, where the intellect does something; but what where it does nothing and where yet I am active? In the *retention* of an image or in the *watching* of an object I am certainly active; but where is the intellectual product? The product appears to be mere attention, and if so, the activity must be attention also. I must meet this objection by attempting to show the nature of retention and of observation. The feeling of activity I will deal with hereafter.

What is active *retention*? The image of a person will not

¹ I should say that I decidedly reject the doctrine that active attention consists in comparison. See Lotze, *Metaph.* 540, *Grundzüge d. Psych.* 26.

stay before our minds, or in reflection we fail to keep hold of an idea or maintain a process. We make an effort and succeed, but where is the machinery? The machinery, I answer, consists of an idea which is able to dominate and so fixes an object connected with itself. This idea may be simply the idea of the presence of the idea required. Again it may be some other idea which implies the first and makes a whole with it, a process familiar under the name of Contiguity. This idea will retain partly by means of Redintegration. It has a context which perpetually suggests the idea to be retained as often as that wavers; and this context again is more or less extensive, and therefore self-supporting or self-restoring. And secondly, the idea (as was mentioned before) will strengthen by blending, and so tend to retain. These I think are the means employed for retention, and if so, there is no specific activity. Let us pass to *observation*. When we watch, say a trap, or perhaps a rabbit-hole, or the proceedings in a law-court, what is it that we do? The last example suggests an instructive distinction. When we observe we must do it in a certain interest; but we may either want to see what happens in this or that special way, or generally to see whatever may happen. And the explanation seems simple. The idea of the object changing itself in such or such a manner is an interesting idea, and so naturally causes retention of this object in prominent perception. And where we are said to watch simply the idea is the same, only now indefinite. If I am told to keep my eye upon anything, the idea of my seeing some change is suggested, and my observation is a case of motived retention.¹ We may say then that either there is no activity or that the activities (mental or physical) are *not* a specific attending. Attention will be everywhere a mere example of the common processes of mind, and will consist in the influence of a dominant idea.

(b) Or if it is said that this dominant idea could not influence, the answer is easy. It must be admitted that, by what has been called "Contiguity," the idea of the end both prompts and selects the means which produce it. And the dominance of that idea is surely indisputable. It may not contract the muscles, and may fail even to produce "a nascent stage of the process of innervation" or "a tendency

¹ We should avoid the mistake of treating these phenomena as cases of Comparison. They *may* involve Comparison, but cannot do so from the first, since they certainly precede it. At an early stage there are not two things held before the mind, and so Comparison is impossible. They belong to the same class as elementary Recognition, where we find a sameness or difference without knowing what that is.

to strive" (whatever that may mean), and if the reader is committed to such ideas, I cannot hope to persuade him. But I would ask others to reflect that we have been willing to suppose that the idea prevails through pleasure and pain, and (if you must say so) through desire. All that is wanted so far for a common understanding is the presence of the idea and the denial that its influence consists in a discharge upon the muscles, whether actual or potential.

"Still," the objection may come, "in an act like retention we fix ideas that waver, and we even recall an idea that has vanished. And we are said to do this by 'the idea of the idea'. But an idea must either be there or not there, and cannot be both, unless somehow 'potential'. So that an idea of an idea is not admissible." I confess that the phrase has a certain obscurity, and I do not know whether any one has worked out the detail of its various meanings. But it is not hard to make a sufficient reply.¹ It is plain that we have the idea of an idea. We may be asked (*e.g.*) for our idea of a statesman, and may be answered, 'I do not call that an idea'. 'Tell me then,' we might reply, 'what is *your* idea of an idea of a statesman.' And that means, Give me the general character which such an idea should have. This account will hold good everywhere. The idea of an idea is a psychical state, the character of which is used representatively and contains the feature of being an idea of a certain kind. We may distinguish two varieties. In the first of these the absent idea which I think of is the idea pure and simple, while in the second it will include my psychical state as I have this idea. For example, I possess a general idea of the solution of a problem, and that in the first case contains merely the general character of the answer required, or the principal feature of the necessary process. But if (as in the second case) I think of myself as having the solution or as performing the process, I must represent also the psychical presence of the whole event, of course again only in its general aspect. Thus, if we realised the first idea we should have simply to fill out its logical content, but the reality of the second would give us its actual psychical existence. And with this passing notice I must leave an objection which depends upon a vicious theory that would destroy logic wholly and cripple psychology.²

¹ I think that Prof. Bain has given to a kindred question an answer that is somewhat confused, in a note on James Mill's *Analysis*, ii. 358.

² The unsatisfactory way in which internal volition is dealt with (or ignored by) the mass of psychologists comes in part from an inability to distinguish clearly between the idea of and the reality of an idea.

To resume then, ideas of ideas are possible, and such ideas can dominate, and the presence of these ideas can produce their own reality. And so far attention has been fully explained as an instance of the working of ordinary laws. But we have still another class of our facts to consider. The cases of attention which so far we have surveyed are in a sense involuntary. In them we had not a resolve to attend. We must now deal with the class where I say, 'I will attend to this matter,' and do so, or where at all events I resolve to perform such an act as implies attention. At this point, it may be said, our explanation breaks down, and here we have a specific and original activity. All before was automatic, but this is volitional and gives us a direct revelation of energy.

But an energy that does what? is the natural reply. I suppose an energy that fixes and strengthens. Well, if so, I am led to remark at once that the presumption is in favour of our old account, because fixation and strengthening was what it explained. If, when I simply attend, that function results from an indirect interest, is it likely that when I resolve to attend we should have to import a wholly new factor and bring upon the stage a supervening agency? Let us examine this more nearly.

When I readily attend to the details of a subject and perform the operations (both physical and mental) that lead to a view of them, or when in general I pursue the means to some end, that, we saw, did not involve any other attention than was explained by the normal working of interest. We must now take the case where, prompted to such application, I am solicited elsewhere, and return to my task after wavering and struggle, perhaps in addition saying to myself, 'I am resolved to mind my business'. And there is a suggestion, it would seem, that in these cases we are met by a difference of principle. But, we ask, where is this difference? In the struggle of ideas and feelings in my mind, and in the inconstant result, there is nothing surely which calls for special explanation, nor most assuredly is there a consciousness of special activity. And if it is the act of resolve upon which stress is laid, then I fully admit that this function must be recognised as differing from others, but I see no reason to think it one kind by itself or as anything but an instance of our general principles. We have seen that what interests occupies our minds, and that it does so directly or indirectly. We have seen that in the latter class we have the working of an idea, and in some cases also the help of an action, physical or intellectual—such action not being an activity of

attention in any specific sense. We saw in short that attention, whether we understand it as the state of our being engrossed, or as an action which brings about such a state, was nothing unique, nothing else but a result and an illustration of more general laws. Thus, if we take interest to mean liking, attention comes from liking, my liking for the thing or for something that implies it, the idea of some person to whom I am attached, or of some pursuit or principle more or less abstract. These interests are ideas which, in the normal course of psychical events, work out their detail by a transfer of liking and support that detail against invasion. We shall see that *resolve* does but illustrate this process.

I am to say 'I will attend,' and am then in consequence really to attend; and on the other hand in our account attention consisted in indirect interest—interest, that is, in a further idea. But here where is the idea? It is not far to seek. If I resolve to attend, I of course have the idea of myself attending. That is, I have either an idea of myself doing this or that work, which work in fact produces attention, or I have an explicit idea of myself attending to something to which the work is in fact a condition. This idea of myself in such a character dominates by its pleasure, or its implication with pain, or its force, or its associations (we have agreed to leave this matter unsettled), and it produces in the common psychological way the means to its realisation. Where is then the difficulty? I have an idea of myself doing this or that, and such an idea may surely be interesting. Or, if it is not so in itself, there are further ideas of myself accomplishing a whole performance which includes it, pursuing (*e.g.*) the greatest possible sum of pleasures, or acting upon some other principle of virtue. In short, give me the idea of myself somehow engaged, and let that idea give me, indirectly or directly, a feeling of satisfaction or success or self-approval, or in some manner interest me, then, if this idea is connected with means that lead to its reality, it surely will produce them in the ordinary way. The result of attention will follow the resolve without any mysterious 'act' which intervenes, and the phenomenon is explained by indirect interest. It may be said that the idea works *because* I fix it, and that this fixation is attending; but the answer is of course that another idea, a still more remote interest, fixes the first one and sets up the process. And if some arbitrary force proceeding from the self is suggested against me, I can only reply that I do not know what this means. I cannot well discuss phrases which convey to me nothing I can find in fact, and which I am compelled to believe are simply unintelligible.

We have now traversed the field which we set before us, and have offered an account of its main phenomena, defective no doubt, but I trust sufficient to answer our purpose. We have found nothing in attention that is not derivative, nothing which could justify our placing it among the primary elements of mind. In attention there is either no activity at all beyond the common processes of redintegration and blending, or, if the activity exists, itself is not attention. Any function whatever of the body or the mind will be active attention if it is prompted by an interest and brings about the result of our engrossment with its product. There is no primary act of attention, there is no specific act of attention, there is no one kind of act of attention at all. That is our result, and through the rest of this paper I shall consider some objections and attempt to remove some remaining difficulties.

I will first make a remark on the nature of Resolve. When I determine to act, either now or in the future (and perhaps again only in case an uncertain condition is fulfilled), I am aware of a peculiar state of mind. I do not act and yet I feel myself asserted, forefelt (so to speak) in an unreal action. But this state admits of an easy explanation. Apart from its actual realisation an idea may possess very many degrees of particularity. Now when the idea of an action is opposed by other states, they prevent it from filling itself out with detail in accordance with the reality at present perceived or imagined in the future. But, as the obstacle is from any cause lessened or removed, this idea will in proportion grow more particular, and, if it cannot lead to action, will be largely filled out by ideal detail. This detail will of course contain feelings the same in character as those which would be present in the real act ; but there is no need to explain this by a hypothetical physiology, or to raise a mist with vague phrases such as "tendency" and "nascent". The fact is merely that of these feelings the greater part (if not all) will be less intense than they would be in the action, and a varying amount of them will be wholly absent. Still enough will be there to give a sense of expansion, such as we feel to accompany our real actions ; and this is mistaken for proof of an inner energy, not derived from common sources, but to be referred to a specific act of attention or some other faculty. I should like to work out this point in greater detail, but I have only room to suggest that any intelligent adherent of arbitrary Free-will should do it for himself.

I will pass next to a kindred source of difficulty. "In

attention," I may be told, "we feel that we are active; we are aware of energy, and we know this directly. In the account which you have given this factor is omitted, since attention comes there as a result from elements that are not active. And we object that the essence of the matter is omitted since the essence is just this revealed activity." But I should reply that, if attention is *not* derivative, the right course is to show my mistake in its derivation. If I have either accounted (or am able to account) for every single thing which your "energy" *performs*, you will hardly persuade me that the feeling you speak of is really effective, or is anything but a concomitant, more or less constant and more or less obscure. And I think that I might fairly leave the matter so. But, since the consciousness of force has been given an importance which is paramount (and I might add transcendent and absolute), it is better to add some further remarks.

I would first suggest that a revelation of activity or of force or of will or of energy (or indeed of anything which answers to a phrase of this sort) is open to dangerous metaphysical criticism. If these ideas can be shown to contradict themselves, then the revelation could be met by an admission of its existence, but also by a denial of the truth of its message; and in England at least I am sure that this criticism has (to speak in general) been merely ignored. I mention this in passing, and I lay no stress on it, since in psychology I do not think such a criticism would be relevant any more than it would be in physics or physiology. But, confining myself to the field of psychology, I utterly deny the alleged revelation. It gives us not a fact but an intellectual construction, and (I should add) a thorough misinterpretation. In the first place I should like to be told *what* it is that the message conveys. Does it tell me of my body or of my mind or of both, and what precisely does it tell me? I have supposed (perhaps wrongly) that psychology is a science which deals with psychical events and the laws of those events, and that the phrase "activity," whenever used, should be explicable in those terms. But though others no doubt may have had better fortune, my own experience is that in our leading psychologies it is difficult or impossible to know what "active" or "energy" means. And since apparently these words stand for something important, I cannot but feel that we have a right to complain. If I may say what I think, the present use of these phrases is little better than a scandal and a main obstacle in the path of English psychology. If one cannot employ them with a definite meaning,

why use them at all? For a psychology that could not get on without them would most assuredly pass its own sentence. And (to apply what I have said to the present case) if the activity which is revealed tells me something about the origin and the nature of those events which we call attention, then, until its message is translated into clearness, we cannot regard it. But if it is meant to be a feeling which gives no message at all, and the question is whether this fact is essential to the process of attention, and again whether and how far we are able to decompose it, then it seems to me that the language applied to this feeling has been strangely misleading. For suppose that a psychical event which we cannot analyse is a necessary link in the process of attending, then from this it will follow that attention so far cannot be explained. But from this there is no passage to a statement about activity, which (whatever it may be) seems certainly complex and largely to be built upon inference from experience.

But on the assessor of such a link in the process of attention lies the burden of proof. Even suppose that a feeling of activity is present, yet we have explained the fact of attention without it, and so we deny its efficacy. And in the second place we remark that a feeling of energy can hardly be asserted in *all* attention, and that it is difficult to say at what stage (if at any) it is always a concomitant. And where it is concomitant, perhaps there we go on to call the attention "active" for no reason but the presence of this delusive feeling, which (so far as we have gone) seems not active at all but an accompaniment more or less superfluous. And if it is said, "But you have not explained this feeling," I might reply that I cannot be called upon to do so. If I do not, does it follow that my account of attention is incorrect? Or, if so, would it follow that *therefore* attention reveals activity or energy or will or any other tidings of the kind? But if this could not be maintained, then perhaps, with a view to make good my case, I should do better to deny the claim of the feeling and to rest on the denial. Still, to throw light on the subject so far as I can, I will offer some remarks on the nature of this much-misused phenomenon.

First let me say that by calling a feeling 'derivative' I do not mean that it comes *simply* from the union of other psychical elements. I do not mean that an emotion is simply those conditions which we say produce it. The conditions, the presence of certain psychical elements, must often, if not always, produce other states before the whole is present which we call the emotion. Of course *how*, for

example, given certain ideas, certain internal sensations follow upon them is an open question; and it is an open question, when those sensations have followed, what part of this mass of sensations and ideas and feelings is the actual emotion. I have not to resolve these doubts, but am to point out conditions through which we get, and without which we should not get, the feeling of activity.

This last phrase recalls a shocking ambiguity. A 'feeling of' has at least three different senses. It means feeling simply felt, and that never as yet has been interpreted by and combined with ideas, or feeling recognised as that which is *of* something else, or feeling not now recognised but modified by the results of past recognition. In the first of these cases the 'of' does not belong to the feeling. It belongs solely to an outsider who adds ideas true or false, but in either case derived from other experience. And to predicate these ideas directly 'of' the feeling is a serious error. Now if we take activity at the stage where it is recognised and is felt as such, we can see at once its composite character. It contains the idea of myself changing something opposed, and it contains still more. If I suffered a change from which something else followed, that by itself would not be taken as activity. The change must come from me, that is, I must have an idea of it (if not also a desire), and this idea, or end, must lead to the change. Now I think no one can deny that to be conscious of all this is possible only through a liberal interpretation of much experience. But on the other hand what sense, when these constituents are removed, is left to my consciousness of energy put forth? If there is a feeling which goes now together with this complex and has gone before it, that feeling is *of* energy in much the same manner in which relief from the pains of hunger and cold is a feeling *of* swaddling clothes and *of* milk, or a metaphysical proof of their absolute reality.

But what is the feeling which becomes by experience the feeling of activity? Or for the present let us ask what are its conditions. I think its origin lies in the feeling of expansion that follows upon the enlargement of the self. I have to assume the doctrine that of our psychical contents a certain group is closely united, and is connected in a very special manner with pleasure and pain, and that this group is the first appearance of our self. I have to assume again that this psychical mass, with its connexions, is perpetually growing larger and smaller as against other elements. And I must assume once more that the expansion gives *in general*

a feeling of pleasure, while contraction brings pain, and that we may call these the two chief modes of self-feeling. I must assume all this here and pass over the difficulties which of course beset it. Now the expansion is *not* the consciousness of activity, nor is it a consciousness of the self or the body or a consciousness of anything at all. It merely is and is felt in a certain way. Not till after a considerable growth of the soul (which we cannot here deal with) does there come the perception of a self and a not-self with what is called consciousness. Then when we get to know from repeated experience that changes ensue upon modes of our self (as a body that is conscious, and later as consciousness along with a body), we acquire the notion of activity or will. We are active when the not-self, consisting in external or internal sensation or perception or idea, changes on the presence of an idea, and (I will add) a desire of that change within the self. This expansion of our area beginning from within gives a certain feeling, and it is interpreted as a putting forth of a something from out the self into the not-self—the something being energy or force or will, named in a variety of phrases all equally delusive, and in fact of course being nothing at all. Where the group of the self is contracted by the not-self and a pleasant idea of expansion is suggested, there is a feeling of pressure. When in addition the limit of resistance wavers, and the ideal expansion is realised partly, with a further advance of expansion in idea and perhaps an oscillation of actual retreat and actual advance, there is wavering and a consciousness of tension and effort.¹ In all this there is a happening—a happening of events; there is nothing beside facts coexistent and successive, with the result of other facts. And I think in this way we could give throughout psychology a definite meaning to action and passivity.

I cannot dwell on this outline, but must hasten to consider a point of interest. There is no doubt that in getting from experience (as we must) the idea of self-expansion, the muscular element is most important. But it would be wrong to say that our sense of tension and effort must always come from muscular feeling. In the resistance of an idea that will haunt or escape us, and in the tension of waiting for the issue of a crisis, the origin of the feeling is clearly not muscular. And if it is urged that at any rate the feeling has elements which must have arisen from muscular experience, that, if true, would not be relevant. It would

¹ Cp. Waitz, 301 ff.; Nahlowsky, *Gefühlleben*, 86 ff.

not show that these elements originate the feeling, and it ignores the distinction between a total emotion and its producing conditions which we mentioned above. I have not said that from self-expansion, however strong the ideas and sensations concerned, and however intense the pleasure and pain, would come the entire emotion of activity, strain, effort and success. Not only do the kinds of the elements involved make important differences, but there is a fresh result of internal sensations. This result,—take, for instance, the sense we have of fatigue or elation,—is exceedingly hard to decompose. It seems an obscure confusion or blending of organic sensations from a variety of sources, and I confess that at present I should not feel able to discuss it. I have mentioned it to point out that it does not concern us, for it is clearly no more than concomitant with, or sequent on, what we call activity. If we have hitherto found no revelation of energy, we need hardly look for its original message in this residual oracle of organic sensation.

I have now said all that within present limits I can say on the psychical origin of our sense of activity, and of the meaning we might give to the term in psychology if so disposed, and I must hasten to bring these remarks to an end. But there is one point as to which I may fear misconstruction. It might possibly be said that physiology proves attention to be active, and that this settles the matter. Now of course I am not competent to speak physiologically. I have the sincerest respect for physiologists. I believe them to be men as a class superior in ability to psychologists and surpassing them in devotion, and engaged on a subject to whose difficulties (it seems to me) those offered by psychology are in comparison trifling. But such a question as the existence of a psychical activity is a matter which falls outside physiology. We might get from that science instruction valuable and, in some particulars, even necessary; but suppose that we knew (as I presume we do *not* yet know) the physical side of the psychical process, is it certain that about the main question we should not be precisely where we are now? For in the first place the existence of this or that feeling could hardly be deduced from physiological premisses if actual observation were unable to find it. And in the second place between a process in the brain and a consciousness of energy there is really a gulf which is not to be filled up. You may know from experience that they are found together, but, given the first, you could never have got to the second, and they remain in the end quite heterogeneous. And so I venture to think that,

whether the incoming current stimulates the centre, or the centre discharges on the motor nerves, or the central motor organ puts forth energy also upon the sensory centre, or whatever else may happen, is as regards the main question entirely irrelevant, and, so far as I can judge, seems likely to remain so. And if any one replies, Here is physiological activity with a psychical feeling, and *therefore* of course the latter must be a feeling *of* activity, I will not gainsay it. I will merely ask him not to vary the meaning of his phrase without giving us notice, and somewhere to set down as clearly as he can what he means by a physiological activity. He should then give us a list of the psychical states where this condition is present, either according to the doctrine of physiologists in general, or of perhaps two or three, or of perhaps himself only. And in this case we may avoid that disastrous muddle of the body and the mind, which may appear "scientific" but can advance no science.

We have now seen that from physiology no evidence can be brought to settle our main problem, and we have already attempted to exhibit the origin of our sense of expended energy. If that account is correct, then a specific activity of attention is no fact observed in the mind, but is a construction more or less fictitious and misleading. And if our account is not correct, that result still remains. We shall have shown that in every stage of attention we require no intervening event, and that a sense of energy (supposing it to exist) would be therefore not essential and probably not effective, but a more or less constant concomitant or result. And, if so, we have accomplished the task we undertook. There are two features however in the process of attention which deserve a passing notice.

Is attention negative, and is it so directly or always indirectly? I think the latter view the right one. When we are engrossed by one thing we lose sight of the others (why this must be so I shall not enquire), but the attention seems positive. And when an idea is painful and perhaps suggests also a prospect of pain, and when because of this character it is weakened or banished (I shall not ask through what means), there is in no case a negative activity of banishment. The attention which banishes is the dominance of an interest exclusive of the first and with a possible dominance of the idea of their conflict. In the latter case the positive interest will be strengthened by a powerful contrast, and attention to the pain will increase its strength and may hasten its disappearance. Further, when we attend to the absence of a certain idea in the sense of attending to

the prevention of its presence, the influence is positive. We have the idea of a certain element being suggested and being found in fact to be incongruous with reality, and we have also (let us say) the desire that this should be so. Hence, when the idea arises, we have (apart from the weakening action of pain) a strong suggestion of its expulsion from the field. And the first chance mental element that suits with this suggestion attracts our notice and is used as the positive side of expulsion. But if the idea of what ought to be expelled is too dominant, the process renews itself and defeats its own purpose. There can be no attention which is merely negative.

Finally we may ask how attention is fixed. We resolve to attend, and we persist in that attitude though the object is not in itself engaging. This is easily explained. In resolving to attend we had, as we saw, an idea of ourselves, and we have in the sequel a constant perception or feeling of ourselves (based no doubt upon our internal sensations) as being here and now and in this or that disposition or attitude. It is this more or less particular perception of self which recalls the resolve, and, in the absence of attention, produces a conflict between the idea and the fact of ourselves. In the same way any obvious external object or internal condition, once connected with the idea of myself engrossed in a certain way by such or such an object, will more or less continually suggest that idea with the usual result. The principle in these cases is one and the same, and the detail of its various applications would hardly serve to make it much clearer.