

DEFINITION OF PSYCHOLOGY

(I)

TO say of psychology that it is the science of the soul, whilst this is in accordance with the literal meaning of the word, is not to take us very far. We need to know at the outset something of what the soul is in itself and how its investigation may best be undertaken. In truth an account of the definition of psychology is to a large extent an epitome of its history. The conflict of opinion already alluded to in our previous articles is by no means a contemporary development, as some of our readers may have been led to suppose, though it has undoubtedly assumed, in some respects, a new form. It is our purpose here, therefore, to trace to their sources in a summary manner these conflicting ideas as to the nature and scope of psychology.

The main issues turn in the first place upon the origin and meaning of the word "soul" and the relation of that which is so called to the body, as well as upon the standpoint from which the study of soul has proceeded. It will be remarked, secondly, however, that a new standpoint was adopted round about the seventeenth century when the earlier accepted notion of soul came to be replaced by that of mind and consciousness, which thus became the primary concern of the psychologist. In a very general way, the earlier standpoint may be described as "objective," the later as "subjective." A third phase came to pass when psychology began to be defined as the science of immediate or individual experience; the word "psyche" or soul being used for the totality of individual human experience.

These stages are summed up by James Ward as follows: "The fundamental concept of the first period was Life, that of the second Mind, that of the third is Experience."¹ Contemporary psychology tends to strike a balance between the standpoints of Life and Experience, and to become more

¹ *Psychological Principles*, p. 2.

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objective in its mode of approach and its practical applications. Hence arises the difficulty of finding a formula which will adequately describe or epitomize all that psychology, as now understood, professes to treat. It is no longer an exclusively introspective study of mind or mental life, but tends to become rather a study of man and human nature as the result of empirical observation and methods. With speculative theories, such as that of the relation of soul or of mind to body, it is not greatly concerned, little attention being paid to this question which occupied, in the psychological textbooks and manuals of preceding generations, a place of preliminary importance.

Such, in outline, are the stages through which psychology has passed from its early beginnings in Greek philosophy to the present time; we will endeavour to fill in this outline with the more important details.

To bring out the contrast between modern psychology, which may be taken to date from the seventeenth century, and the earlier traditional psychology, we must first of all touch briefly upon the origins of the latter in the philosophical teachings of Aristotle in the fourth century B.C. This thinker is rightly regarded as the father of psychology, having been the first to teach a systematic and scientific doctrine of soul in all its main functions and having embodied in his writings on ethics and rhetoric a psychology of conduct not unlike that which passes under this title to-day. He approaches the subject of "soul" by a consideration of the obvious, though not easily explicable, differences between living organisms and the non-living things. Living organisms comprize all such material things as appear to possess an intrinsic principle of movement; in this way they are primarily distinguished from the non-living things which have no such power of self-movement. The principle of this self-movement, which as he observed also includes the power of development and reproduction, Aristotle called $\psi\upsilon\chi\acute{\eta}$ or soul; soul may therefore be defined as the *first principle of vital self-movement* (in other words, of life) *in living organisms*. This concept of the living organism and its first principle lies at the root of the Aristotelian psychology. But it is

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further obvious that living organisms are differentiated amongst themselves in respect of their several capacities for life and movement. Some appear capable only of growth and reproduction, like plants; others add to these sensation and locomotion; whilst in man, in whom all these other capacities are found, the supreme degree of life is found in his exclusive capacity of intelligence and reason. It follows, therefore, that to each of these three primary and irreducible categories there corresponds a correlative principle of life, or a soul.

The point now arises as to the nature of the relationship of this vital principle to the body which it is said to animate. It is not easy to state this simply, for it involves concepts which belong not to the physical but to the metaphysical order (to use those terms in their modern implication). We may perhaps state it briefly thus. All material things, whether animate or inanimate, are what they are and differ in kind from each other in virtue of some immanent constituent principle of being and nature, known as "form." "Form," the active principle, and "matter," the potential or receptive principle, are the ultimates of which "things" are composed. In all living things it is the soul which plays the part of the "form," and the relation of soul to body is primarily that of "form" to "matter" whereby a single living substance of a particular kind is constituted. The living organism is, therefore, a unitary whole whose manifold functions, deriving from the formal first principle or soul, are functions of the organism as a whole.

A certain difficulty arises, however, in regard to man whose form or soul is proved by its special functions of intelligence and reason to be "spiritual," i.e. immaterial, and capable of subsistence apart from the body. The rational soul, as far as its highest psychic functions are concerned, shows a capacity which far exceeds that of any material organ and seems to call for independence of any such organ; yet *de facto* it is united to and uses a material body. The solution seems to be that the soul, notwithstanding its spiritual and rational character, is of its essence intended to be the substantial or essential form of an organized body and

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includes in this capacity the vegetative and sensitive functions proper to such an organism. The three grades of vital activity, though radically different, are not mutually exclusive but may well complement one another as the composite activity of a single subject. By reflexive consciousness with regard to his own varied activities a man knows himself to be essentially "one" and refers these different functions to the one unitary "self" as the subject of all its actions; and in so far as it is the rational soul which is the active constituent principle of this self, the facts of experience are adequately explained by the union of the soul to the body as its substantial form. In Aristotle's teaching, therefore, the body is the instrument, and ordinarily speaking the necessary instrument, of the soul's functioning and the relationship of one to the other becomes reasonably clear.

It is evident, therefore, that the study of the organism becomes in a broad sense the study of the soul itself. Hence Aristotle's psychology includes a good deal of what we now treat of under the separate sciences of biology and physiology. But in dealing with each category of vital operation his procedure was the same; with the rational operations of intellect and will, as with the sensitive and vegetative functions, he looks to individual experience to furnish the data for classifying and establishing the nature of all vital functions, and so of discovering the nature of the soul itself through the operations of which it shows itself capable. The general doctrine which he put forth in his *περὶ ψυχῆς* was revived and amplified by the scholastic philosophers, and notably by St. Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, and finally became the traditional and universally accepted philosophy of the human soul, at any rate until the seventeenth century when, with René Descartes (1596-1650), was ushered in the second stage of the history of psychology.

Descartes is regarded as the father of modern philosophy, and he certainly brought about a widespread secession from the Aristotelian school of thought, in psychology as well as in metaphysics. In the first place he eliminated from the concept of soul all the vegetative and sensitive functions assigned to it by Aristotle, retaining only what was purely

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intellectual. Soul, or rather mind, is contrasted sharply with matter as being itself a pure thinking essence, inextended and unconfined, whilst matter or body is essentially a thing of extension and position in place. Any conjunction and interaction between two such disparate elements was for him inconceivable and impossible. As he was obliged, nevertheless, to explain the apparent facts of experience which seemed to call for precisely this interaction between soul and body, Descartes had recourse to a theory of divine assistance. This was developed by his pupils, notably by Malebranche, into the theory known as "Occasionalism" which maintained that on those occasions when mind and body seemed to influence one another reciprocally a special divine concurrence was necessary in each case.

For our present purpose we have to notice that, since soul is regarded as a separate thinking substance with thought as its essential activity, henceforth the mind or consciousness alone became the sole object of psychological study. Everything else in man dependent on the material functions of the body was relegated to the realms of physics and mechanics; the human body, as a body, is to be regarded as a machine, just as all animals were regarded as mechanical automata devoid of soul. (It is to Descartes, we may mark in passing, that physiology owes its conception of mechanical reflex action.) There is a fundamental inconsistency to be observed in this new theory, for its author could not entirely discard his belief in the essential unity of the human personality, even though he persistently maintained the radical opposition of mind and body in man. Hence his resort to the theory of divine assistance which was, at least as far as the origin of ideas is concerned, a throwback to the ontologism of the Augustinian school. His extreme dualism excluded the derivation of knowledge by abstraction from sensory perceptions, therefore he posited the immediate intervention of God as the source of the ideas in the mind. We need not pursue this theory further; the point to be noted for our enquiry has been sufficiently made, namely that henceforth mind or consciousness, and not soul as the substantial form of a human organism, becomes the focal point of psycho-

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logical study, and *the science of mind or consciousness* becomes its generally accepted definition in the new school of thought. The further stages in the development of psychology and of its definition now take on a new complexion.

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By thus beginning with man's immediate experience of his mind and its operation, the future of philosophy, and later of psychology, was profoundly influenced. Without entering into details we may say briefly that the chief outcome as regards philosophy was an extreme empiricism and subjectivism. Psychology of the experimental kind which flourishes to-day had so far not yet arisen; there was, however, much speculation on the nature of mental operations and the relation of the mind to the body. We shall not go into this latter question here, but it should be borne in mind, in view of later developments, that the psychology of that period was pursued more in the interests of epistemology and metaphysics than for its own sake, as it is to-day.

But in regard to modern psychology—the psychology, that is to say, of the past half century or so—the effect of the Cartesian theory of mind and matter was considerable. In the first place, as James Ward remarks, it gave to psychology that subjective standpoint which in a very general way, and correctly interpreted, distinguishes this branch of science from the so-called “objective” sciences of nature. It is largely owing to this point of view that psychology later on came to be defined, or described, as the science of consciousness, or of conscious mental contents and acts—unsatisfactory terms which in themselves require much further explanation.

An advance in a more modern direction was originated by John Locke who, in his *Essay on the Human Understanding*, started from the premise that all knowledge was derived from experience, and that this experience is concerned partly with the objects of the outer world around us and partly with the objects and events occurring within the mind as observed, so to speak, from within. This led Locke to make a distinc-

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tion between "inner" and "outer" sense, or "inner" and "outer" experiences. This point was subsequently taken over and more fully developed in a psychological direction by the German philosopher, C. A. Wolff (1679-1787), who originated the school of psychology of the inner sense or of internal experience. It is at this time that we first meet with the words empirical or experimental psychology as distinguished from rational psychology, for Wolff was the author of two treatises dealing with different aspects of psychology, which he entitled *Psychologia empirica* (or *experimentalis*) and *Psychologia Rationalis*. Empirical Psychology, according to Wolff, consists of two principal parts, the one particularly concerned with the cognitive capacity, the other with the desires and reciprocal actions of soul and body, Rational Psychology, on the other hand, being mainly taken up with the nature of soul itself, which was held to be a simple substance. Wolff further insisted that "introspection" was the only means of obtaining knowledge of the mental processes. Psychological studies in Germany were greatly stimulated and influenced by Wolff's theories, becoming dominated by the method of introspection.² The words "internal experience" and "introspection" are of frequent occurrence during this period and even later.

Though many years were yet to elapse before an experimental psychology, guided by the accepted principles of scientific method, was to become detached from the general philosophy of the mind, it may justly be said that Wolff gave it a start, and it is from this period that the expression "empirical" or "experimental" psychology gradually began to acquire a significance of its own. Tetens, a pupil of Wolff, began about this time to make experiments of a psychological character on the duration of sensations. In this way psychology was gradually passing from the study of "Mind" to that of "Experience."

The question now arises as to what kind of experience it is with which psychology, considered as a science distinct from other sciences, is properly concerned. Some writers, follow-

² Villa, *Contemporary Psychology*.

ing Locke and Wolff, speak of internal experience, or of "immediate" experience, taking up a somewhat extreme subjective position. The immediate difficulty with which one is confronted lies in the fact that psychology takes into consideration many other facts of experience—physiological facts, for example—which cannot be described as facts of internal experience, unless indeed a purely Berkleyan standpoint be adopted. The scientific psychologist, like any other scientist, accepts the outer world of experience as objectively real, as real as the world of so-called inner experience, and is not concerned with the nature of the ultimate relation or connection between these two worlds. The word experience implies a subject for whom there is experience, and how "outer" experience becomes the subject's own experience is a matter to be left to the discussions of philosophers.

This point was discussed by Külpe and later by James Ward, when these writers attempted to define the province of psychology. Külpe³ begins by stating that all science deals with facts of experience; psychology, therefore, being a science, follows suit. But whilst the sciences of nature, like botany, geology, or physiology, can be defined by reference to the particular class of facts which they select for study, it is not so with psychology, which, as Külpe maintains, cannot be defined by reference to any particular class or group of facts, but its essential characteristic as a science must be sought in some particular characteristic attaching to experience itself, and this he finds to consist in its quality or property of dependency on the individual.

"There is no simple fact of experience," Külpe writes, "which cannot be made the subject of psychological investigation. . . . We must look for the distinctive character of psychological subject matter, not in the peculiar nature of a definite class of experiential facts, but rather in some property which attaches to all alike. This property is the dependence of facts of experience upon experiencing individuals."

"We often express this," he continues, "by saying that psychology is a science of 'psychical facts,' facts of 'con-

³ *Outlines of Psychology* (Eng. transl., 1909).

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sciousness,' or that the facts of psychology are 'subjective.' Such phrases are one and all misleading."

James Ward writes in a similar strain,⁴ defining psychology as the science of individual experience. "Its standpoint, the point, that is to say, from which the psychologist views all experience, is individualistic." This does not mean to imply, however, that psychology is to be tied down exclusively to the introspective method. "There is nothing," so Ward writes, "to hinder the psychologist from employing materials furnished by his observations of other men, of infants, of the lower animals, or of the insane; nothing to hinder him from taking counsel with the philologist or even the physiologist, provided always he can show the psychological bearings of those facts which are not directly psychological. But by whatsoever methods, from whatsoever sources its facts are ascertained, they must—to have a psychological import—be regarded as having a place in, or being a constituent of, *someone's experience*. In this, i.e. as presented to an individual, 'the whole choir of heaven and furniture of earth' may belong to psychology, but otherwise they are beyond its scope. Psychology, then, we define as the science of individual experience—understanding by experience not merely, not primarily cognition, but also and above all conative activity and behaviour."

Regarding psychology in the light of the preceding statements many difficulties disappear, though others indeed crop up when we attempt to fit into this definition all that knowledge which to-day comes under the general heading of "psychological." There is one difficulty in particular to which each of the above-mentioned writers refers, namely, how can one define the individual who is held to be the subject of experience. The individual experiencer is a "someone," as Ward says, a "self," as others say, in which we recognise two components, a mental (mind) and a physical (body). It is this "psychophysical" entity to which we usually refer when we say "I" or "you," or when I speak of "myself." We further realise that "thinking" taken in

⁴ *Psychological Principles*, 1918.

its widest sense, or "remembering," or "making up our minds to do something," concerns the mental side of the self rather than the bodily side, though the latter in many ways contributes to the total process.

Scientific psychology, in its endeavour to avoid metaphysical problems, is usually content with the hypothesis of a parallel series of mental and physical events, without attempting to explain their connection. Philosophical psychology has tried to solve the difficulty either by equating mind with brain, and so getting rid of dualism, or by equating body and all apparently physical events with mental events and so reaching a spiritualistic form of monism. These are questions which cannot be discussed here. For the purposes of a scientific psychology it is sufficient to accept the whole self, however this may be fundamentally constituted, or the individual experiences as the subject of that form of experience we describe as psychological. It is this conception of the meaning of psychology, and of the common expression "psychological," that seems to cover sufficiently all the fields of psychological study.

To make the definition of psychology perhaps more clear and comprehensive, we should include Külpe's point concerning the dependency of experience on the experiencing individual. This is indeed implied in Ward's discussion. In the phrase "someone's experience," for instance, the accent falls, as regards the psychologist, on the "someone" as an essential factor in the situation as a whole. The physiologist, for example, studying the conditions of the rhythm of the heart, or of glandular secretions, is studying certain facts of experience; but the accent in this case is on the facts observed rather than on the subject. There could of course be no science of physiological facts without a physiologist to study them; but he is concerned with the facts and his experience of the facts, or by interpretations of them; yet he is thinking more of the experience itself than of his own subjective awareness of the facts. It is here that the "subjective" character of psychology appears, for the psychologist might be interested in the same facts of experience as the physiologist, but not for themselves so

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much as because they are either his experience or are related to other experiences of a psychological nature.

If, however, in spite of the difficulty of rendering a precise account of the particular psychological quality of experience, we adopt the definitions of Külpe and Ward, these seem to provide the solution to many current difficulties and controversies concerning the scope of psychology. Ward indeed is quite explicit on this point. Hence there seems to be no reason whatsoever to set a behaviourist definition of psychology over against others, or against an introspectionist experimental psychology as the *proper* object of psychological study. The gain to the study of human nature, in general and particular, by thus extending the scope of psychology will not be disputed. But that is not a reason for asserting the exclusiveness of a behaviourist point of view, as some writers in recent times are inclined to do. There must be a theoretical as well as a practical science of psychology, theoretical in the sense of a theory of mental life based on observation and experiment, apart from any practical applications.

In these days, however, the practical side of the subject makes a far wider and more popular appeal than the former more "academic" type of psychological investigation. Practical psychology, though largely indebted to theoretical psychology in regard to technical methods, has to develop special methods of its own. According to the various kinds of experience which practical psychology investigates, so will this branch of the science tend to split up into various lesser branches, such as child psychology, educational psychology, medical psychology, industrial psychology, and so forth. Each department will be fulfilling the general plan of investigating individual experience in its dependency on the individual. There is, of course, nothing to prevent psychologists or others making use of the results of such investigations to better the general conditions of human life, and of our knowledge of ourselves and others, but that is, strictly speaking, to be considered not so much psychology as making use of psychology.

If, then, we appear to favour defining empirical psycho-

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logy in the sense of Külpe and Ward, we are fully aware of the difficulties, mainly epistemological, which arise therefrom. As we have seen, the question turns on how to differentiate the science of psychology from other sciences. Can we now attempt further to fit the literal meaning of psychology, science of the soul or psyche, to its definition in terms of individual experience? This can only be done on the basis of a definite theory of the nature of Soul. The experience, or the facts of experience, which the empirical psychologist investigates can be viewed either from within, as experience, or from without, as the activity of an organism; in either case we may seek for some fundamental principle to which all such experience or activity can be referred. We have outlined, in the first part of this essay, the Aristotelian conception of soul as the first principle of life in living organisms, manifesting its activity in and through the various activities of the organism considered as a unitary being. This theory provides a basis wherefrom all psychological data can be synthesized and given a fundamental unity, a basis more satisfactory than that offered by Cartesian dualism. We may therefore conclude by reaffirming psychology to be fundamentally a science of soul, at the same time retaining its definition as the science of individual experience as that best fitted to the empirical and experimental aspect of the science.

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