

PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS TWOFOLD RELATION

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The establishment of a psychology section in The Indiana Academy of Science, and the extension of membership by this learned group to the teachers of this subject, gave rise in my mind to the old, but ever-recurring question: Is psychology a purely positivist science, or is it a philosophical science, or is it related to both?

To formulate a correct answer to a question so far-reaching in import makes it necessary to determine precisely the scope of psychology. At present there is no definition of the term that meets with the approval of all students of the science. Even a cursory study of ancient and modern texts on the subject reveals a striking lack of unity in the concept of this discipline.

The name psychology is by no means as old as the science itself. Consequently, the term does not define for us the science. Philip Melanchthon of Germany introduced the term at the end of the sixteenth century, and it was popularized in the eighteenth by Christian Wolff. Translating the Greek roots (*psychē*, *logos*) literally, psychology would mean the science of the soul. However, a careful study of the history of psychological thought proves that such is not the original concept of psychology.

In the fourth century B. C., the first scholar of antiquity, Aristotle, scientist and philosopher, regarded psychology as a part of physics, the science of all corporeal beings in as far as they are subject to change, which depends on First Philosophy or Metaphysics, the science of the principles of all being. The subject matter of psychology was man, composed of body and soul, and its method, internal and external observation and reasoning. In his treatises *De Anima* and *Parva Naturalia*, Aristotle made a remarkable attempt to analyze the nature of the soul, its powers, and mental phenomena. He says:

"Our aim is to grasp and understand, first its (soul's) essential nature, and secondly its properties; of these some are thought to be affections proper to the soul itself, while others are considered to attach to the animal (i.e. the complex of soul and body) owing to the presence within it of the soul . . . which ought we to investigate first, the whole soul, or its parts? . . . Again which ought we to investigate first, these parts or their functions, mind or thinking, the faculty or the act of sensation, and so on?"

Coming to the Middle Ages, we find the incomparable scholar and eminent Christian philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, in perfect accord with the pagan Aristotle. With him, likewise, psychology is a most important chapter of physics, because man is the microcosm and the central pivot of all nature. The matter treated by Aquinas in questions 75 to 90 of pars prima of the *Summa Theologica* could easily be detached and edited as a treatise on psychology. The problems are divided into two groups, the one relative to the nature of man, the other to his mental activities. It is clear from the great scholastic's writings that the proper scope of

¹*De Anima*, p. 402, Eng. Trans. Oxford. 1931.

psychology is man composed of body and soul; and not soul alone, or mental phenomena alone.

The *Summa* plainly states:

"We shall treat first of the nature of man, secondly of his origin the first object of our consideration will be the soul we shall first treat of what belongs to the essence of the soul; secondly, of what belongs to its power; thirdly, of what belongs to its operation."²

This conception of the scope of psychology, which linked it both with science and philosophy, was, generally speaking, held until the seventeenth century,—a century rich in scientific achievement which marks a conflict between scientists and philosophers that unfortunately persists until the present day. The marvelous discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Torricelli, and Lavoisier, effected a complete revolution in the sciences of astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology. In consequence, a number of hypotheses long associated extrinsically with Aristotelian or scholastic philosophy had to be discarded. Failing to perceive that the abandonment of such scientific theories would in no wise affect the great organic and constitutional doctrines of their philosophy, a group of short-sighted Aristotelian philosophers made themselves ridiculous by seeking to defend the exploded physical hypotheses. Reasonably enough, a philosophy which tolerated such proved absurdities was soon discredited; and scientists felt urgently impelled to cut away from the past and to begin anew the quest for knowledge. And so, from this period—the dawn of the sciences of observation and experiment, may be dated the unfortunate divorce between science and philosophy, a divorce keenly perceptible even today in the psychological discipline.

From now on, a common feature of all definitions of psychology is the limitation of its scope to the phenomena of the mind. The true founder of empirical psychology, psychology as a science of mental phenomena, is John Locke (1632-1704). He clearly distinguishes psychology from physics and metaphysics. In the Introduction to his essay, "On Human Understanding," Locke says:

"I shall not at present meddle with the physical consideration of the mind, or trouble myself to examine wherein its essence consists, or by what motions of our spirits, or alterations of our bodies, we come to have any sensation by our organs, or any ideas in our understandings, and whether those ideas do in their formation, any or all, depend on matter or not. . . . It shall suffice to my present purpose, to consider the discerning faculties of a man as they are employed about the objects which they have to do with."³

With Locke a tradition began which with minor modifications was continued without interruption by Hume, Hartly, and Reid of the Scottish School; by the two Mills, Bain, and Herbert Spencer, British adherents of the Associationist School; by Royer-Collard and Jouffroy of

²*Summa Theologica*, I, q. 75, p. 3, Eng. Trans. London. 1922.

³Essay on Human Understanding, Introduction, p. 17. Chicago. 1917.

the French School; and by the psycho-physicists, Fechner and Wundt, of the German School. As the name indicates, psychology in the latter school developed into the science of inner or mental facts, and of their relations to their physical and physiological concomitants.

Locke's conception of the scope of psychology is defined in most of the current American writings. William James, the psychologist of greatest influence during the past thirty odd years, describes psychology as "the Science of Mental Life, both of its phenomena and their conditions."⁴ Ladd considers it "the systematic description and explanation of the phenomena of consciousness as such."⁵ McDougall defines it as "the positive science of living beings."⁶ To Dewey, psychology is "the science of facts or phenomena of self."⁷ Woodworth describes it as "the scientific study of the activities of the individual."⁸ Pillsbury names it "the science of behavior and the knowing functions of man."⁹ Watson limits its scope to the "objective study of human behavior."¹⁰

From these few typical definitions it is fair to conclude that the majority of non-scholastic psychologists all the way from the seventeenth century down to the present day consider psychology a purely positivist science from which all philosophical problems are to be excluded. But is it practically possible for the psychologist to preserve a philosophically neutral attitude in the explanations of the treatment of the higher intellectual processes? Is a psychology adequate that confines itself to an analysis of mental phenomena alone? Again, is it possible to give a rational explanation of such mental products as universal concepts, the notion of moral obligation, responsibility, personal identity, and the many mental diseases, when the psychologist divorces the phenomena of the mind from its inner nature? Perhaps answers to these questions can be found in the neo-scholastic psychologist's conception of the scope of this subject.

Ordinarily, the neo-scholastics describe psychology as "the philosophical science which investigates the nature, attributes, and activities of the soul or mind."¹¹ Thomas Verner Moore, a leading member of the group, defines it as "the science of human beings developed by an analysis of their mental life by experiments, by observations, by everything that will enable us to obtain an insight into the minds of men—how they know, how they think, how they reason, how they feel, how they react in the difficulties of life."¹² This scope meets the demands of science and of philosophy, namely, a cataloguing of facts, establishing the relations between them, and ascertaining their relation to cause, both the proximate and the ultimate.

A truly scientific psychology should comprise an experimental investigation of mental activities; that is, mental processes, mental products, and mental dispositions—then from the character of these activities by synthesis, to arrive at the metaphysical conclusion as to the

⁴Principles of Psychology, vol. 1., p. 1. New York. 1902.

⁵Outlines of Descriptive Psychology, p. 3. New York. 1900.

⁶Outlines of Psychology, p. 1. New York. 1923.

⁷Psychology, p. 1. New York. 1891.

⁸Psychology, p. 3. New York. 1929.

⁹Essentials of Psychology, p. 2. New York. 1930.

¹⁰Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist, p. 9. New York. 1929.

¹¹Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 12. p. 457. New York. 1907.

¹²Dynamic Psychology, p. 10. Chicago. 1926.

nature of mind. Any adequate study of the mind must naturally present itself in two stages: empirical psychology, the study of the phenomena of the mind by internal and external observation and experiment, and rational or metaphysical psychology, a study of the nature of the subject of these activities or phenomena with its attributes, by both the inductive and the deductive method. The intrinsic connection between many questions of the two stages are so indissoluble that they cannot be considered apart. Although separated for teaching-purposes, they are organically connected.

From the nature of what should be the adequate scope of psychology, the above seems to be the correct answer to the question raised in this paper. In its empirical branches, psychology is related to positivist science, and in its study of the ultimates of the root-principle of mental phenomena, to philosophical science. May we not hope that The Indiana Academy of Science by bringing together the natural scientists and psychologists will effect in the twentieth century what the seventeenth failed to achieve—a rapprochement between philosophy and science.