

WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY

In this day one hears the word 'psychology' bandied about by all sorts of people but generally with a very imperfect understanding of just what psychology is. There is a quite considerable popular tendency to regard psychology as a sort of substitute for religion and a general cure-all for human ills. As is characteristic of nearly all popular use of scientific concepts there is a great deal of misunderstanding as to just what psychology is and also with respect to the field of usefulness of this body of knowledge. Consequently, it is important that members of the D. of P. should have some clear understanding of just what psychology is and thus know in what ways it may be applied effectively and legitimately.

Psychology is the latest field of knowledge that has become an object of scientific research in the West. Long ago it constituted a field of study in the Orient as might be expected, since the inner or psychic man has always been an object of prior interest in the East. But the Eastern approach to the problem of the psychical organization of man is very different from that which obtains in the West, with the result that the problem of psychology and the formulation of the results of research take on very different forms in the two cases. The doctrine of the inner constitution of man is a part of the fruit of Eastern psychological insight. But the Eastern Initiates in the investigation of psychological problems had the advantage of certain psychical organs which are not generally awakened in the case of Western scientists. Consequently They are enabled to reduce much of the psychical nature of man to an object which can be

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observed that is quite beyond the possibilities of the exoteric Western investigator. This fact must be born in mind when evaluating the results of Western studies.

The psychological problem arose in the West when scientists and philosophers became aware that the external world of nature beyond man is determined, in part at least, by the organs or processes by which man becomes aware of that world. By looking within himself the student found that it was possible to observe certain more or less inner processes which are seemingly subject to certain laws of behaviour. It was early discovered that at least certain of these inner factors had a definite effect upon the reliability of external observations. Thus a group of discrepancies in the observations of the transit of a certain star by two astronomers led, finally, to the discovery that a certain time elapsed between the recognition of a sensory impression, such as the moment of conjunction of a line in a telescope with a passing star, and the reaction which could be made by the observer as a notation of this fact. It was found that this reaction time varied with different individuals and also in the same individual at different periods owing to the action of a number of ~~extra~~ factors. This led to a protracted study of reaction time and this constitutes one of the classical pieces of psychological research. But it was not long before it became clear that in psychology there was opened up an enormously complex field with ramifications reaching in all directions affecting consciousness. The amount of work devoted to studies in this field rapidly grew until now it has one of the most important fields of scientific research.

Western psychology is a part of Western science in general and involves the subsumption of certain postulates of method common to all the sciences. Now there are important respects in which these subsumptions differ from those which are taken as a base in the East, particularly in Occultism. Since the subsumptions determine the nature and limits of the information secured in a general sense, it is necessary to have some understanding of these. The Western scientist assumes, but cannot prove, the validity of the following assumptions:

1. That nature acts uniformly according to a principle of causal connection.

2. That the datum of experience derived through the senses (in this case the external senses alone being understood) affords an adequate bases for tracing causal connection.

a. This implies the arbitrary denial of causal factors not available for observation by the senses either directly or aided by appropriate instruments.

3. That by a process of inductive reasoning from the data secured by a finite observation a law of causal connection can be inferred that is generally valid.

4. Having once arrived at a formulation of such a law of causal connection it is possible then to deduce by formal logic the effects that will follow from a given set of causes.

It should be clear that no determination of the whole body of Western science can have a higher order of validity than that which belongs to the foregoing assumptions. Two of them must be true if such a thing as a valid body of systematic knowledge is to be possible. These two are the uniformity of nature and the dependability of logical

deduction. But both Occultism and competent philosophical criticism challenge the general dependability of the assumptions numbered (2) and (3).

The branch of ~~SCIENCE~~ natural science in which the West has had the highest degree of success has been in physics, the very field that was most objective and in which psychical factors are of the least importance. As a consequence of the outstanding success in this field (the domain in which the West definitely excels the East) all of the other sciences have tended to follow the program and methods of the physicists. In all other fields, save astronomy, these methods have been progressively less successful as the research has been devoted to phenomena connected with life and consciousness. However, outside of psychology, the success in building the sciences has been sufficiently great so that there exists but one science in each field. But in psychology this is not the case. As has always been true of philosophy, there are a number of schools of psychology. Now the existence of various schools in any field of knowledge is proof that no one of the schools is really a science in the strict sense of the word, for when anything is definitely proved, that is, objectively known, difference of opinion ceases to exist and there remains but one opinion on the given subject. The inescapable conclusion is that, however successful the typical Western method may be in physics, it fails very badly when the object of study is the psychical organization and behaviour of man. Consequently Western psychology in its present state affords no basis of certainty and should be applied only with much circumspection and with considerable doubt as to the general validity of its conclusions.

Now, entirely apart from the question of the validity of the findings of psychological science there is another question as to the significance of these findings that has often been neglected even by men of intelligence. Psychology, and for that matter empiric science in general, gives only determinations of fact at its best. These determinations of fact are called 'existential judgments'. Such judgments lie in a dimension quite distinct from those which give significance, meaning or value. The latter kind are sometimes called 'spiritual judgments'. It is a great mistake to confuse these two kinds of judgments. The importance of this point will be made clearer by an illustration.

Among other things, psychologists have devoted considerable attention to the study of the phenomena of genius. In this case we understand 'genius' to cover all cases of outstanding greatness from the founders of great religions and philosophies down to the most secular manifestations of greatness. It has been found that in the vast majority of cases, at least, men of genius have traits in their psychical makeup that is abnormal. Many of these traits are similar to those found among individuals who are definitely psychically pathological. The gland surpluses or deficiencies may be abnormal and there may be symptoms generally classed as neurotic. But all findings of this kind give only existential judgments, i.e., the external and observable correlates of the manifestation of genius itself. So far there is no harm done. But many students at this point take another step that is not at all justified, i.e., of discrediting the achievements of genius because the glandular action or the nervous state was abnormal. The actual content of the achievement of genius

is its own justification or the reverse, and the findings of the medical psychologist is entirely irrelevant in this domain. If, for instance, genius produces a machine that works and is useful that fact is determined by considering the functioning of the machine alone, in total disregard of the state of the glands or nerves or psyche of the inventor. The same principle applies to the religious, philosophical, artistic and other productions of genius. The state of glands, nerves and psyche of the producer have no bearing at all upon the truth-value, the art-value or the utility-value of the production.

The important point to note is that psychology, like every other science, gives only external fact in the essential sense. The real Inner Man stands on a level analagous too, if not identical with, Significance and Value, and this is a domain forever beyond the range of objective observation. The Self is not an object of study for psychology, especially in the Western sense of the term. If it is true, as seems to be the case, that the higher manifestations of the Inner Being of man requires or produces a distortion of ^{the} usual biologic or psychical functioning, then it is our standard of normalcy that is cast under the shadow of doubt. It simply means that there is something basically wrong with the man that we call normal. Remeber that that which is called the 'norm' is simply the usual, and from a higher point of view it may be quite defective or even abnormal.

Psychologically considered man is a thing and not a Self or Spiritual Being. It is a serious mistake to confuse the psycholoigcal object or thing with the real Man. However,

this is very often done, even by men who should know better. There is the equivalent of a very serious trespass in all this and it is but natural that the outlook of the psychologist should arouse a rather deep resentment in sensitive and profound natures. Such, however, need not be the case, provided the psychologist confines his conclusions within the limits that are scientifically valid, that is, within the limits properly belonging to existential judgments.

There is no doubt that to some extent conscious states can be controlled by psychological means. Conscious states generally, at any rate, have their nervous, physiological and psychical correlates which may be noted objectively. Which of these two is causally prior is not always clear and is, in general, a question belonging more to metaphysical philosophy than to psychological science. But it is today a very common prejudice or superstition of the biological and psychological sciences that the existential or observable correlate has the causal priority. However, this standpoint is not and cannot be proven by the observable facts or by logic. Other interpretations of the facts can be given and are given by Occult science. But it is important to know just what are the prejudices as well as the essential methods of modern psychology. Having this fundamental materialistic prejudice the modern psychologist seeks to control states of consciousness through the manipulation of the observable correlates. Enough success has attended this mode of procedure to lead some students to regard applied psychology as the key to human happiness and growth. So we may have a formula for happiness based upon manipulation of gland secretion, the use of suggestion and a number of other external

practices. Unquestionably, used under the appropriate conditions and with adequate understanding such courses of action have their field of valid application. But the profounder psychologists have discovered, what the Occultists have always known, namely, that the greater depths in man cannot be reached by this method. Thus Dr. C.G. Jung has found that in old age a disbelief in immortality tends to produce a neurotic condition that cannot be handled by the purely external methods. Hence, as a doctor he prescribes belief in immortality as a kind of medicine in such cases. But isn't there something like a profanation in the whole idea ^{of} in viewing a belief as a kind of prescription? The psychologist is concerned in this belief as a mere ^{agent} psychological which produces certain effects tending toward normalcy. It is immaterial whether the belief is valid or a mere delusion. Is not the essential external nature of the psychological outlook clear in this? It is all a kind of Hatha Yoga and, unless used in a strictly subsidiary sense, is quite repugnant to the higher Yoga, where Truth, Reality, Significance, Value, etc. are the vital considerations.

In order to arrive at a general understanding of the field of knowledge properly comprehended by psychology it is necessary to consider the difference between psychology and philosophy. Many regard psychology and philosophy as being closely aligned and this idea gains force from the fact that in many colleges and universities the two subjects come under the same department and very often teachers of psychology are also teachers of philosophy. It is true that both are concerned with problems of consciousness, knowledge and the soul and there are thus certain similarities in the fields covered. But the aspects

of these fields with which each is concerned are quite different. In fact this difference is so great that the similarity of psychology to the other empiric sciences is greater than its similarity with philosophy. Consequently the placing of these two disciplines in the same department is quite deceptive. Indeed there are strong reasons for believing that philosophy in the higher sense has more affinity with pure mathematics than with psychology. In any case a clear understanding of the proper field of philosophy is important.

In the first place it is important to bear in mind that both historically and currently the word 'philosophy' has been and is employed to cover quite different ranges and emphases of meaning. Only a few centuries ago philosophy comprehended all fields of research now covered by the special sciences as well as the special disciplines still remaining with philosophy proper. The term is still employed at times to designate a general reflective attitude towards the problems of life as well as in the more restricted sense of a trained and systematic study in specialized domains. It is in the latter more restricted sense that we are now considering the term.

Philosophy today is confined to logic, ethics, aesthetics, epistemology and metaphysics. But even in these fields there is often an overlapping of the strictly scientific motive and method with the rigorously and purely philosophic. In the future it is possible that specialized science may make even a further encroachment upon these philosophic fields. But there still remains an essential feature characteristic of philosophy which never can become a part of science in the narrow sense. As already noted, the concern of science is with existential judgments or determinations of fact combined with the organization

of the body of determined facts into a logical system from which deductions can be drawn and checked by experience. But all this is only one kind of knowledge among others and it, together with all knowledge as such, is only a part of the sum-total of all possible consciousness. So never by any possibility can science ever attain a place where it can comprehend the whole of human interest. Philosophy, then, in the strict and highest sense deals with a phase of knowledge which is quite other than that which can fall within the limits of science in the current meaning of the term. Now the real concern of philosophy is with spiritual judgments or those judgments which relate to significance, truth, reality, value, etc. Thus philosophy is concerned with the spirit and soul of knowledge while science is restricted to what we may call the body. This is true of modern psychology just as much ~~just as much~~ as of any other special science. Science in general as well as psychology are supplementary to philosophy but they never can replace the latter.

There has been a wide spread tendency on the part of science to resist and belittle the claims of philosophy and in this the psychologists have sinned as much as any other scientific group. In fact, at this time it would seem that this anti-philosophic spirit is stronger in the biologic and psychological groups than it is among the physicists and astronomers. The scientists in the two leading scientific disciplines have, in recent years, had quite a shock which has resulted in a wholesome doubt of the complete adequacy of current scientific methodology and primary assumptions. But it still remains true that the predominant body of scientists, particularly in the case of those of secondary caliber, ~~are~~^{are} antagonistic to philosophy and feel

that the scientific approach and method is sufficient, in principle, for the solution of all human problems. All of this has led to a way of thinking ~~the~~ and evaluating that is essentially materialistic. This has meant, in effect, an exclusive predication of reality relative to the body (using this term to cover the whole of that which falls within the range of sensible experience), and a denial that any reality attaches to the notions of soul and spirit except, perhaps, as a sort of epiphenomenalism superimposed upon and derivative from the body. Almost the whole of modern psychology takes this standpoint, and while there are some psychologists, as in the case of C.G.Jung, who are aware that this standpoint is inadequate, yet they hardly dare outspokenly to assert a counter position if they would not lose professional standing. This is a very important point for the student to keep in mind if he would avoid being misled by his psychological readings.

Neither fact nor logic forces the scientist to assume the materialistic perspective. Science demands a logically coherent system which comprehends all known facts. This is a perfectly proper demand. But we also know today that it is possible for the imagination to devise any number of alternative systems which will, equally well, satisfy the formal scientific requirements. Preference for one or another of such alternative possible systems or models, all of which may be regarded as logically equivalent in the scientific sense, requires something more than a bare scientific attitude of mind. In the forming of such preferences factors such as prejudice, feeling or religion or metaphysical insight enter in. No consistent scientist as a scientist has any right to object to any individual preferring a system other than that which the given scientist prefers,

provided the alternative system meets all the requirements of logic and scientific experience. But at this point scientists are more often prejudiced and all too fallible ordinary human beings and they manifest quite as strong bigotry and intolerance as that associated with the ordinary religious doctrinaire. It is at this point, and only at this point, that our sympathy with the motive, purpose and endeavors of the scientist ceases. At this point we challenge him for intellectual as well as ethical and spiritual reasons.

The materialistic prejudice of the ordinary scientist becomes peculiarly invidious in the case of the psychologist, for here science encroaches closely upon domains that are sacred and it is possible to effect a serious damaging of the soul of man. There are much more serious things that can happen to man than simply dying in the physical sense too soon. The substantial increase in the expectancy of life which empirical science has effected in recent decades is a real achievement, but if increased longevity simply means a longer incarceration in a kind of hopeless materialistic hell without any hope for the soul, then the sum-total effect must be regarded as more evil than good. Increase of insanity, nervous disturbances and suicide are indicators of the damages that are being done, and both psychology and the biological sciences, particularly in the applied forms, must share a large, if ~~the~~ not the chief, burden of responsibility for this. It is not safe for the student to allow himself indiscriminately to come under the influence of Western psychology. There are individual applied psychologists who, because of a deeper spiritual understanding than is possessed by most, are safe psychological guides. But, unfortunately, this is not the rule.

Primative magical belief as well as most tradional religion stand in agreement with Occultism in maintaining that there is an inner man, commly called 'soul', who has an existence not derived from the physical body and capable of a continuance apart from the physical body. Modern psychology and biology radically repudiate this view, not because either logic or the facts force this repudiation, but simply owing to the widespread materialistic prejudice. The former view, at least in its higher philosophic expressions, maintains the primacy of spirit and consciousness and ~~assets~~^{attaches} a purely subordinate or derivative status to body or objective and sensible matter. On the basis of this view the soul or psyche is the resultant of spiritual as well as of material forces. Western psychology typically asserts the ~~xxx~~ sole agency of material forces as determinants of the psyche, even when the actuality of the psyche is recognized. Clearly from the latter standpoint the notion of immortality is unthinkable as well as many other possibilities of consciousness which are realized to be unequivacally realities by the spiritual^y illuminated. The Occultist knows that the soul or psyche has a spiritual as well as a material heritage. A psychology which grows out of this understanding has a very different philosophical and religious significance from any which may grow out of the materialistic perspective of the West. Many problems of man may be properly handled from the psychological angle but such an approach to them is safe only when the psychologist has established his base in spirit rather than in matter. This is why even a superstitious and doctrinaire priest is a safer psychologícal guide than the typical Western psychologist.

On the whole I must warn against rather than advise the

use of modern applied psychology. Undoubtedly the West has acquired a valuable body of psychological fact, but the vast number of psychological schools ~~xx~~ makes it evident that this body of fact is very imperfectly understood. The materialistic prejudice often makes the psychologic application positively malicious. Some uses of this body of knowledge unquestionably ^{are} is innocent enough, but on those matters that reach toward the reason of the soul, beware of Western psychology.

Yogagnani