

PSYCHOLOGY DOWN THE AGES¹

LIKE other sciences which have gradually emerged from a pre-scientific state, psychology arose when man began to ruminate on the mystery of life and the ways of human beings. The general facts of knowing, striving, feeling, desiring, willing, and so forth, were recognized and expressed in the common sense of people and expressed in perhaps a crude form in the customs language—folk-lore and myths of early times. In the attempt on the part of thinkers to find a rational explanation and a systematic grouping of such facts lay the beginnings of scientific psychology, the science of the *psyche*.

Professor Spearman traces the rise of psychology and the course it has taken throughout the ages to the present day, carrying the reader pleasantly and not too arduously through the intricacies of opposing ideas and theories as these have in successive epochs come to the fore.

Much that was known and clearly expressed concerning the *psyche* by philosophers of old has in the course of time either fallen into obscurity or been vigorously opposed by newer theories, which have frequently departed from the strong foundation in common sense so conspicuous in many an older but neglected doctrine. An outstanding merit of this treatise lies in rescuing the teaching of the ancients, of Plato and Aristotle, of Aquinas and the schoolmen, from this neglect, and confronting it with the efforts of modern psychology, to the advantage in many cases of the older teaching.

Commencing with an enquiry into the original meanings attributed to the word "psyche" or "soul," the author goes on to examine the general problems and methods of psychological science, its gradual separation from physiology and philosophy, and final emergence as an independent, or rather, to be more accurate, a self-subsisting branch of human science. Here we indeed encounter a disconcerting

¹ *Psychology down the Ages.* By C. Spearman, F.R.S. 2 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1937; 30s.)

paradox in that to-day, whilst this subject is being lauded on all sides as *the important science*, psychologists are divided into a multitude of camps, representing an almost chaotic confusion of opinions and theories, to the bewilderment of the student embarking on this study. It is not difficult to see that the chief source of diversity lies in the lack of a sound guiding metaphysic. The conclusion is evident even though in these volumes no general metaphysical theory is offered for our acceptance. But since the aim of the author lies in tracing the course of psychology rather than in expounding any particular general philosophical doctrine, this would have gone beyond the limits of strictly historical statement.

After this preliminary survey of what psychology, generally speaking, is seeking and how it is doing so, we come to the problems of mental structure or constitution. The first great achievement in this direction—dominating all early psychological literature, and, if less explicit, still extremely potent to this day—has been what we may broadly call the doctrine of “faculties.” In what sense can the *psyche* or soul be said to be divided into parts, constituents or powers? This question was acutely treated by both Plato and Aristotle, and later by Aquinas. The doctrine of faculties fell into disrepute at the time of the Renaissance, and in the current literature of to-day is often looked upon as unscientific. The expression “faculty psychology” being used rather as a term of reproach. Nevertheless the notion of faculties persists in such expressions in common use as capacities, abilities, and the like. The first of such faculties or powers is naturally that of Intellect which, at one time raised to a sublime and unique place in the constitution of the *psyche*, gave way to a revival of ancient “sensist” doctrines in which all knowledge is supposed to be derived from and to consist exclusively in sensory perception. To-day the controversy turns once more on the concept of intellect and intelligence. Intellect was formerly taken to mean a power-intelligence, this power in its actual exercise. With the advent of intelligence tests it has become necessary to examine closely what in such tests corresponds to an estima-

tion of intelligence as distinct from other abilities such as memory or attention. In general the intellectual faculties were sharply distinguished from the sensory-faculties and included under the general heading of cognitive powers. Over against them are the faculties which regard the functions of the *psyche* concerned with striving, desiring, feeling, willing and doing, to which Aristotle gave the term "orexis," and of late years re-introduced into psychology, to cover that which in an earlier psychology used to be known as appetite, will, and passion.

The *psyche* is shown to have an oligarchic structure consisting of interrelated faculties which in no-wise impair its essential unity. Without some such theory of its constitution we are faced with chaos.

The structure of the *psyche* can now be analysed or dissected into elementary constituents, beginning with those which are most in evidence to common-sense, namely, sensory perception in its various forms, the perception of relations, and ways of regarding. Thence the enquiry is directed to thought and mental dynamics, or "orexis." The teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas on voluntary action, which starts with the question whether in human acts there is anything voluntary, introduces this important subject, the leading conceptions of which are summarized in a useful and clear scheme of the main divisions of the *psyche*. The status of feeling and emotion as mental states is next subjected to analysis, and is followed by a discussion of "units" or "complexes" of behaviour, which in turn leads to the very modern—in emphasis at least—notion of unconscious mind.

In the earlier chapter on what Psychology is about, it is the conscious mind which is therein mainly envisaged; but does this cover the entire subject? The notion of unconscious mind or mental activity is not so new as might be imagined from the perusal of contemporary psychological literature, though it has acquired largely by the investigation of Freud, Jung and others an importance which seems almost to outweigh all other aspects of psychological science. In reality historical enquiry reveals the idea of unconscious mental activity to have been at least implied in the earlier

psychologies; and later, from Leibnitz onwards became more explicit, as may be seen in the writings of Herbaert, Hamilton, Hartmann and others. The doctrine of unconscious mind has received further support as well as elucidation from the study of the "Neuroses" and other forms of "abnormal" mental behaviour. From the preceding analysis and synthesis one important item has had to be omitted, namely, the actor in the play—the Self or "I". All mental as well as bodily activity is in common-sense language referred to an individual denoted by "I," "You," and so forth. One speaks of "myself," "ourselves," and so forth. But in what does this "self" consist? How does one arrive at a knowledge of the Self or Ego? Philosophers have argued copiously over this problem, but scientific demonstration of a "self" active in thought and volition has been reached by experimental psychologists aided by a refined technique of introspection.

The first volume ends with a critical survey of the recently developed "Gestalt" psychology, which is helpful to our understanding of its meaning and value. A very important question is raised in the second volume, namely, *Is Mind subject to Law?* Are there any scientific psychological laws governing our mental activity? Many writers have asserted that not only is mind not subject to law in the scientific determinist sense, but also that psychology has failed in its attempt to discover any such laws. A notable example was William James, who concluded that with regard to psychology there was "not a single law in the sense which physics shows us laws."

It must therefore be shown first of all what the nature of a scientific law is, and thence to proceed to the search for genuine psychological laws. It is noticed in passing, that ancient psychology makes no mention of laws, and it is not till about the eighteenth century that psychologists, following in the wake of the physical scientists, began to make the search for laws in psychology the leading idea in their work. Even to-day, no mention of laws is made by such exponents of the science as McDougall and the late James Ward. Professor Spearman is nevertheless of the

opinion that there are real psychological laws, and he devotes several chapters to their exposition. As is well known he has made a valuable contribution to the subject in his *Laws of Noegenesis*, to which the essential and common processes which go by the name of thought and thinking may be reduced. Other laws concern memory, voluntary control, which are of great value in pedagogy. There are moreover found to be laws connected with the "output of work," "fatigue," laws of "orexis," and of "basal conditions." The latter are important and regard the influence which, for example, the glands of internal secretion, such as the thyroid, pituitary and sex glands, through their products known as "hormones" exercise on the development of physical and mental conditions.

Having dealt so far exclusively with the science of the *psyche* in general, it remains to consider what is individual, that is to say "not that wherein people agree, but that wherein they differ." It is easier by far to see how individuals differ as regards this or that psychological ability or capacity than to discover how the *psyche* is generally constituted. It is also in some respects more important for practical purposes. The so-called "practical" or "applied" psychology is largely concerned with these individual differences of psychological endowment. At this point the psychologist is once more confronted with the old problem of "faculties," or differences in knowing, in doing, in feeling, and so forth. Then, too, there are the "temperaments." How much of a person's character and ways of behaviour are to be assigned to the influence of temperament? And in what does temperament finally consist? How may the temperaments be distinguished? Modern psychology has improved perhaps on the ancient doctrines of Hippocrates and Galen, but there is still much uncertainty and difference of opinion. Contrasting types of temperament have been put forward, such as that of the Introvert and Extrovert of Jung and McDougall, the Cyclothyme-Schizothyme pair of Kretschmer, Surgent-Desurgent (Cattell), to mention only the better known groupings. All seem to witness to certain valid differences in temperament, but each writer assigns a

different name to features which in some cases are to be met in each system of classification. In this way there has arisen a new "Typology" or science of psychological types which plays an important part in the psychology of personality and character.

There is a profound disagreement however concerning the mode of approach. Some authors prefer to rely on general observation and intuition and less on the more exact, and exacting, method of statistics. Professor Spearman is a well-known exponent of correlational psychology, and his work in the domain of cognition has been followed by other investigators in that of orexis. In order to discover what really and truly goes with what, it is maintained that recourse to correlational coefficients provides the only accurate technique. But other writers maintain that by this method the total personality is lost sight of, submerged as it were by a mass of mathematical coefficients relating to a sum of individual traits. To obtain a general and often more adequate "understanding" of constitutional character and temperament, the individual must be considered as a whole and intuition will be a fairly reliable guide thereto.

Each of these approaches to the study of personality has its merits. Correlational psychology furnishes definite and reliable information on the amounts which a given individual or a group of individuals may possess of any general or specific ability, and shows how these abilities stand or fall together, or are "correlated." It is in this field that tests have been devised in great number whereby to explore the various forms of individual ability. Intuitionists however can present a more general, and for practical purposes sufficiently accurate, diagnosis of personalities and characteristics.

Amid the ups and down of its long career psychological science has made progress. To-day we do definitely know more of the details of psychological functioning, and the science is moreover becoming more and more related to sociology, as sociology is to psychology. But there is yet a great need for an agreed metaphysical theory to knit the diversity of details into an intelligible whole.

AIDAN ELRINGTON, O.P.