THE IDEAL ASPECT OF PSYCHOLOGY

G. J. KIRN, NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE, NAPERVILLE

Since I was introduced to the subject of Psychology thirty-five years ago great changes have occurred in its fundamental conceptions and definition. In some respects there have been unexpected expansions and in others equally startling limitations. I have no doubt but that both have added much to the general interest in the subject. During this time the definition of Psychology has changed many times. At the earlier date we defined it as the "Science of the Soul"; later we defined it as the "Science of the Mental Life", the "Science of Consciousness", the "Science of Human Behavior" and more recently as the "Science of Behavior."

The first change in definition grew out of the acute observation of David Hume, who asserts that no matter how carefully he introspected he never found anything to which the term "soul" could apply. He always found himself conscious of a content but never of a so-called container. The subsequent observations of philosophers have confirmed Hume's position and have made the substance theory rather unpopular. That change in metaphysical conception has made the original definition of psychology quite inadequate. A second reason for the changes is found in the separation of psychology from its parent, philosophy. It has taken the course of the other sciences which have proceeded to an intenser study of their subject matter by abstraction and self limitation. The psychologist proceeds oblivious of what other people are doing in other fields, unless it be in the field of biology, for which psychology seems to have a special affinity. In some cases it appears as though psychology is little more than a study in physiology. The third reason is found in the disposition of the scientist to have objective criteria for measurement. Consciousness is too subjective and too individualistic to be the subject matter of science. Science must have objective data which can be subjected to experimental investigation and mathematical measurements. And still another reason is found in the pragmatic tendency of the age. The tend-

ency of pragmatism is to discard all theorizing that cannot be turned in for its cash value, apparently forgetting that science is generally called upon to work out consistent theory before it attempts to make practical application of it. I am not underestimating the method of the pragmatist. I interpret the meaning of "satisfactoriness" as used by Professor Dewey to mean the successful vindication of an hypothesis by the careful consideration of all pertinent facts. In the history of science the theoretical stage always has preceded its practical application.

I certainly am not opposed to the application of psychology to the practical affairs of life. For twenty years I have been offering courses in General Psychology to which I have added courses in Genetic, Experimental, Educational, Social, Abnormal, Religious and Applied Psychology. I am not born a prophet, but I can foresee with considerable clearness how the results of the psychological laboratory will greatly augment the efficiency of the people who will accept its offer. That applied psychology needs objective standards is beyond dispute. It certainly is fascinating to study the behavior of people, to ascertain individual differences, to watch modifications resulting from a learning process, and to observe to what extent changes depend upon environmental conditions. The changes which have occurred in industry due to the application of psychological discoveries to the task of the worker fully justify the enthusiasm which the practical psychologist has for his limited specialty.

This great achievement in applied psychology, however, should not blind us to other psychical facts which are no less obvious. For forty years I have made a study of the psychological basis of ethics and religion. I am thoroughly convinced, as every student of the subject knows, that religion and ethics are not objective systems formulated and turned over to man for his pledge of allegiance. And yet the phenomena of religion must be reckoned with. I do not find religion to be primarily fidelity to an institution but loyalty to personal ideals which have a psychical basis. I am fully aware of the contention that these problems must be turned over to

the philosopher for final settlement. I am not opposed to this division of labor in the field of research, but I do object to the dogmatism of the psychologist who sees in the psychical field nothing beyond his self-imposed limitations.

Functional psychology has many points of advantage. I was one of the first to use Prof. Angell's psychology in my class room. I think it an excellent method of studying psychical processes. According to this theory, the psychical stands for the readjustment of the organism to sensory stimuli in accordance with retention traces of previous experiences. The retention traces are the product of the sensory stimuli, the motor responses and the sensory consequences growing out of the motor responses. The association centers retain these experiences and later, even without an external stimulus the whole process may be set in operation. The cerebral rehearsal of this previous experience becomes a check and determines the response when the original stimulus is again experienced. This accounts for the complex mechanism of the mental life. The value of this procedure cannot be discounted. The adjustment of the organism will always be a pressing problem, but it does not exhaust the meaning and function of the psychical.

Psychology has done well to abandon the sterile conception of a soul substance, but it would be unpardonable recklessness to abandon the concept of psychical energy, or a psychical life. Whatever the metaphysician will say ultimately about life it will always be recognized by its striving toward ends. Darwin made his great contribution to the thought of the world when he pointed out that life proceeds according to law and that these laws are not mathematical or mechanical. Living organisms do not merely adjust themselves to what is but are selective of the parts of the environment to which adjustment is made. Insects and animals with more definitely organized instincts make their own environment, as is seen clearly in the ant, the bee and the bird. In human behavior we must reckon with impulses that make for spiritual goods, such as literature, art and science, and

becomes the urge to social, political, ethical and religious ideals.

Dr. Prince has done some excellent work in the study of multiple personality. His striking conclusion is not the mystery of multiple but the achievement of unitary personality. Instead of looking at the ego as a unity with various faculties, he considers it to be a composite structure built out of psycho-physical dynamic mechanisms, called instincts, each having within itself its own driving force. Each instinct is a dynamic mechanism striving toward an end. The ends differ and often are in conflict wth each other. Personality, as Professor Angell points out, possesses intrinsically tendencies to unify and organize these instinctive tendencies into a consistent and harmonious whole.

Let us now take up the study of the psychical life in greater detail to see what ideal tendencies it discloses. Instincts are more or less definite mechanisms of behavior. They serve the purpose without previous training to adjust the organism to its environment. They may be explained mechanically, as the result of open synapses in the cerebro-spinal system. They may be explained genetically by referring to the evolutionary process by which they came into being. They doubtless arose because they have survival value for the organism. While it is true that the mechanism of instinct requires a stimulus to set it going, the resulting action is not in the strict sense a mechanical product, because the response looks forward to the good of the organism. The end is often quite remote. The bee gathers wax and constructs its cell in order to store up its honey. The food instinct impels to the immediate gratification of hunger, but it serves a remoter purpose in storing up glycogen in the muscles, nerves and liver for future use when the relations between the organism and environment become strained. The mastery impulse strives immediately to overcome a present obstacle to the well-being of the organism, but a remoter end appears in the feeling of satisfaction growing out of the consciousness of its own superiority. It lies at the root of the problem solving disposition. When coupled with the social instinct it

expresses itself in the potent urge to social excellency. Doubtless the highest forms of satisfaction are not found in the hedonic consequence of sensory stimulation but in the consciousness of difficulties mastered. Even the sex instinct, while it consists of an immediate impulse towards the object of its love, has a remoter meaning in the perpetuation of the race and the foundation of the one of the most important social institutions, the home. Again, consider the instinct of curiosity, which, starting with a manipulatory disposition for the purpose of discovery, when stimulated by an object, a noise, or a taste, is nevertheless an urge to far reaching explanatory research. Simple as it may appear in the animal or in the young child, it is the dynamic that moves the scientist to unravel the mysteries of nature.

There can be no doubt that the discoveries of the scientists have had great practical value when applied to the affairs of everyday life. I am the last man to quarrel with the pragmatist at this point, but I am convinced that the great urge felt by the scientist is not primarily practical utility. It was rather a more consistent and harmonious organization of experience. It was the interest of the knower in the thing to be known. At any rate I cannot see what great practical difference it would make to the multitude of earth's toilers whether the "Nebular Hypothesis" of LaPlace or the "Planetesimal Theory" of Chamberlain and Moulton will ultimately prove true. And yet the Chicago men have worked long and hard that they might organize astronomical facts into consistent and harmonious relations to each other. Man has the conviction that the universe is knowable and feels a strong impulse to know it.

The hostility of nature to man and his enterprises is apparent to all. We need no Schopenhauer to tell us that from the standpoint of human interest nature must be reconstructed. Nature does not adequately shelter man from her own inclemencies. Little of the food he eats is allowed to remain in the form in which he finds it. The swamp and marshes are not compatible with the cultivated tastes of the artist. The landscape gardener does not adjust himself to what he finds, but aims to re-

construct and transform what he finds into similarity to his artistic ideal. The artist is creative, and true creation starts with the ideal which it aims to embody in a concrete form. Artistic creation can be explained only by assuming that the psychical life has ideal tendencies.

We may proceed to study the percept from the standpoint of its mechanism. We may say that it is the product of sensory experiences, which leave retention traces in varying degrees of complexity. When subsequently any one of the particular stimuli that figured in the original is experienced, it tends to reproduce the whole complex of previous experience. There is, however, another aspect to perception. It has an important function for the organism. At any time when a stimulus is experienced the organism anticipates the experiences associated with it, thus enabling the organism to make favorable adjustments to consequences which it anticipates. In the strict sense of the term the percept is an ideal construction, perhaps never an adequate construction, for the organization of sensuous experiences, and functions as a plan for action.

The higher forms of thought disclose more clearly their teleological aspects. Thinking starts with a felt need. The thinker recognizes the need of something not possessed. The possession of the longed for becomes the pressing problem. The solution of the problem consists in the dramatic rehearsal of all possible suggestions and the final adoption of the suggestion which carries with it the best evidence of its adequacy. In a genuine thought activity the problem is a new one and the solution also must be novel. It always requires a readjustment of the mechanism of the past with reference to a future or ideal contingency.

I think a study of the facts we have fragmentarily pointed out thus far lead us to assume that the psychical is a life proceeding to organize its experiences into a consistent and harmonious character. It not only preserves the memories of the past but also makes a forecast of the things that are yet to come. It is impelled by the conviction of a causal interrelationship of all phenomena of experience and is impelled to recognize that

its conduct must be consistent with rational ideals. I do not ask that we accept the theory of a soul substance, nor am I prepared to argue the theory of the vitalist. But I do ask that the psychologist be true to the facts which his subject presents. The psychical life is fundamental. It will not allow itself to be made a mere instrument for the adjustment of the organism to its environment. It will not yield itself to the status of an efficiency machine. It has ideals of its own and thus becomes the foundation of philosophy, sociology, education and religion. These subjects are commanding the respect of the world because they are the natural and legitimate outbudding of the psychical life.