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THE OLD PSYCHOLOGY*

By

J. A. Cardno

University of Tasmania.

The spate of "new" psychologies with which we were familiar in the nineteen-twenties (to say nothing of the nineteen-tens and the eighteen-nineties) has died down, and psychologists now talk in terms of points of view and preferred concepts rather than party allegiances. Nevertheless, one impression persists which needs to be enquired into. Among those interested in the subject, but not themselves psychologists, it takes this form: psychology is in continuous, large scale flux, and is therefore a new-fangled, insecure, aggressive, and rather "gimmicky" field of endeavour. Among psychologists themselves, the assumption is more specific and sophisticated: it is, that psychology became respectable with the rise of experimentalism (with the foundation by Wilhelm Wundt of the laboratory at Leipzig in 1879, if an exact date is wanted), and that previous work can be relegated to a species of antiquarian rag-bag, or rubbish-heap of superstition.

True, any standard history will show that this is by no means correct, and when a psychologist directs his attention specifically to the history of his specialty within the subject, he keeps finding anticipations of concepts he works with now. Nevertheless, the psychologist who is primarily a historian-psychologist remains uneasy. He feels that his professional ancestors are not recognized at their true level of attainment. The nature of human beings, as revealed by their behaviour and their reports of experience (to take no wider a field) is a continuing, enduring part of our world, as we contemplate it and ask ourselves questions about it. The sense of the word psychology may change, but the fact of solid, continuing, and sober contribution to the answering of these questions has been a feature of thought, European and other, for many centuries. (Sober at least in terms of effort, perseverance, and sincerity, if not in terms of concepts.) The impression which this article will try to specify and to substantiate, then, is this: given human nature (which has not changed radically in the past century), and given persistent effort to understand it, is it not likely that psychology will possess through that period a common body of subject-matter and attitude to it which will remain unaltered in essence despite change in method and approach? Does this mean that the non-experimental psychology of the earlier nineteenth century has been undervalued? Does it mean, further, that the pre-experimental psychology and the experimental alike are expressions in differing idioms of a basic perennial psychology, and that if either diverges from this the divergence is only apparent, or erroneous, or not relevant to psychology at all?

The importance of this argument, its difficulties, and its fruitfulness for understanding are best illustrated by an example. A persistent problem of psychology, experimental or not, is the vast growth in complexity, richness, modifiability, and effectiveness which the behaviour of living creatures exhibits as they progress from infancy to maturity. Part of the suggested explanation is that as creatures develop they acquire new motives. There are rival definitions of motive itself, but here we may take the broadest current one "any state or event within the organism that (under appropriate circumstances) initiates or regulates behaviour in relation to a goal."[1] Now let us compare and contrast a pre-experimental and an experimental discussion of the acquisition of motives, the appearance in the individual of states or events, as initiating behaviour which earlier in the life-history they did not do. For succinctness and ease of recollection we shall call these the case of the money-mad miser (pre-experimental) and the case of the cue-crazed ewe (present-day).

First, the old-time miser: just over a century ago the first great textbook in psychology appeared. Its author, Alexander Bain, is remembered for accurate, detailed, comprehensive, and indefatigable observation. His treatment of the miser (a familiar figure in previous literature) is selected therefore as likely to show the main features of pre-experimental method and approach, and to do justice to this kind of psychology.

> It is well-known (says Bain) that many things sought, in the first instance, as means, come, at last, to have a force in themselves, without any regard to those very ulterior consequences, but for which they would never have been taken up. The acquisition of money once commenced, one is apt to get a fascination for the thing itself, although, strictly speaking, that has no real value. The truth seems to be, that with the handling of the universal medium of purchase, a new susceptibility is developed, there being something in the form and manner of the object that commends it to the mind. A latent taste is incidentally made manifest, and the gratification of it brings a new end".[2]

Such is Bain's description of a familiar course of development, in which something that is not an original end of one's nature (such as the slaking of thirst) becomes such an end, a mover to action, through experience, or in more recent terms, through social learning, "a learning process in which social demands are the determining conditions".[3]

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Second, the present-day sheep: this creature appears in a situation where, as R. S. Woodworth said in effect, " any means employed to reach a goal [cf. Bain's money] might subsequently become a motive in its own right, or, in terms of his own formulation, any mechanism might become a drive. In essence, this is the first formulation of the doctrine Gordon Allport came to label the 'functional autonomy of motives' ".[4] This writer, D. B. Klein, then quotes at length from a study by H. S. Liddell on neuroses in sheep and goats. Liddell refers to " a source of annoyance and frustration in our study of learning ", the " sheep's insistence on running through the maze for its own reasons—not for the reasons or 'motives' that we attributed to it ".[5] The particular situation was, that the sheep (plural) were learning a maze (cf. money again) in which the reward (cf. the things money buys) was either food or return to the flock.

> " In spite of their invariable mistakes (continues Liddell), the normal sheep seemed eager to run the maze day after day. The experimenter, on coming into the barn to start the day's work, would regularly find these animals clustered about the screen-door leading to the maze as children congregate around the ticket-window for the Saturday-afternoon movie. When they reached the food-box at the end of the maze, they often did not delay there. One mature ewe was always in a hurry for the next trial. At the food box she rubbed her snout along the surface of the oats perfunctorily, sometimes taking a small bite, and in one continuously wheeling motion rushed off to the starting gate again . . . Her maze activity was completely absorbing. The sheep obviously was not motivated to exercise her defective skill in the alternating maze either by longing for the reward of food or by the prompting of a gregarious instinct. She ordinarily ate little or nothing from the box of oats and we found that shutting out the sight of the flock by closing the wooden storm door to the barn did not startle or disturb her. We may conclude that the running of the maze was a self-rewarding activity which was also self-perpetuating ".[6]

Now as to resemblances and differences of these two examples. Firstly, Bain deals with human beings, Liddell with animals. Secondly, the former speaks of fascination, susceptibility, taste, gratification; the latter of reward, activity, and behaviour in detail, although he admits eagerness, absorption, and longing. Bain deals in terms of anecdote, Liddell in those of experiment.

The apparent contrast in the choice between human and animal behaviour is no contrast. Bain describes animal behaviour in detail elsewhere, especially in his early work *Animal Instincts and Intelligence,* where his view of psychology is remarkably " modern " in that he says " A mistaken fear of submerging the dignity of man should not prevent us from identifying the superior and inferior types of animal existence to the full extent of their agreement."[7] This view he justifies in the words: " the nervous system is the medium of all the instinctive, emotional, intelligent and active processes of the animal; in so far as it is similar in two different creatures, these processes are usually found to be similar."[8]

The difference between the anecdotal and the experimental aspects, however, is striking. The example above, since it is general or imaginative anecdote, might be held to over-stress the divergence between the old and the new psychology. But an instance more closely linked to fact will redress any unfairness in this respect. Thus Bain says elsewhere: " To discriminate hypochondria, or false alarm, from a mental depression indicative of actual disease, is singularly puzzling at all times; probably one aid in the discrimination might be furnished by enquiry, if the person was naturally susceptible to minute degrees of the healthy and unhealthy influences, as atmosphere and the like; in other words, whether there was originally a keen consciousness of organic states. The late Lord Jeffrey was a man of this sort ".[9] As anecdote goes, this is closely linked to fact, to an individual. But it occurs (it was selected by chance) in an area where study is still clinical rather than experimental. It highlights the great observational attainment of Bain in personality study without lessening the gap between him and present-day writers, experimentally speaking. As to the contrast in vocabulary, the " inner-ness " of Bain's key terms, as opposed to the " outer-ness " of Liddell's, is obvious, and suggests a line of contrast to be recognized and evaluated.

Taking anecdotalism and " inner-ness " together, we have an indication of the serious indictment that can be brought against psychology before 1879. It is, that psychology then lacked the methodological ballast that experiment provides, and so was liable to be tossed about by the wild winds of speculation, imagination, and downright phantasy. To make matters worse, anecdotalism deprived psychology of the measure of anchoring that strict observation would have provided.[10] These attacks are serious, but not so uniformly damning to the pre-experimental psychology as many have thought. Leaving moderate authors like Bain for the moment, let us consider what really extreme writers, whether ancient or modern, can do. An author who consciously tries to combine the merits and avoid the defects of Hegel and Schleiermacher is not likely to be lucid, factual, or concise—" scientific ", so to speak. Indeed he runs grave risk of plumbing depths of incomprehensibility never attained by his mentors.[11] The kind of psychology that emerges may be illustrated thus: both Hegel and Schleiermacher assume Being as the foundation of their systematic constructions (from which their psychologies stem). But Leopold George says that if Being is assumed, then one runs into systematic difficulties at once, and the only way to avoid these is to drop " all presuppositions and start with what scepticism itself never doubts, namely, nothing ".[12] Thus George starts from a metaphysic with a catch in it. Building on this, and taking what he wants from Hegel and Schleiermacher, he produces an ordered explanation of reality by a system of categories which run in nines, with this result for psychology: " Since spirit is the sum and substance of all these categories, everything which proceeds from spirit is subject to them. Accordingly, therefore, thought is; and psychology in the part in

which it treats of thought, will have to show why thought is bound down by these definite rules".[13] At one level this may appear to be explanation of the nature of the universe, at another the contriving of a bed of Procrustes which is also a labyrinth, in which the reader is lost and human nature contorted into strange and fearsome shapes. A standard historian of the period allows that this "contains some isolated points of value. But the systematizing spirit (he adds) overrules these tendencies and the work is cast in the dialectical form of a ninefold evolution out of nothing".[14] Psychologically, the weakness of such a system is that the author's observation of experience is bound to come in conflict with his preconceived notions. For instance, in George's psychology motion plays a large part, "so large, in fact" (says Brett) "that one might seem to be reading a physiological introduction to psychology until the artificial character of the exposition is grasped".[15]

This psychology (which is not the most extreme one can find) Brett characterized as a "curious mixture of sound sense and cosmic rhythms".[16] The cosmic rhythms, not the sound sense, were the feature of it most admired at the time. The sound sense, on the contrary, is the element which will justify this, or any other pre-experimental psychology. Accordingly the next step in assessing the permanent merit of the old psychology is to see what minimum common element, what enduring substratum of reasonable reflection on human nature, it has with the new, and what gross divergences from it are fashionable, or have recently been so. Now, the most extreme contrast with George's cosmic psychology is the behavioural science (some even called it behaviouristics, not psychology at all) which aims to depend on data words (terms used in describing *what happens*,) and deprecates or rejects outright concepts which are intuitive, that is, according to these writers, "undefinable without the introduction of non-empirical, non-objective sets of referents, and hence . . . (without) place in scientific statement."[17] (These "intuitive" concepts are the very ones that a speculative or "cosmic" psychologist like George depends on most.) The writer just referred to, W. S. Verplanck, aims to provide "an empirical vocabulary that can be used by anyone in the science of 'human' or 'animal' behaviour".[18] His general attitude may be fairly illustrated by two quotations. First, he remarks "I suspect that a major part of the behaviourist's problem is to provide a scientific account of how and why intuitive concepts are developed and used, that is, to 'explain' them in terms of human verbal behaviour and discriminative control".[19] This is the furthest concession Verplanck will make to intuition. He adds, however, that such concepts "do not belong in statements of fact or in statements of theory set up to deal with fact".[20] Second, Verplanck's own personal experience of intuitive concepts is entirely negative: "the writer remains ignorant of what a *cognition* is. So far as he knows, he has never had one, and no one has ever been able to correct him on this, or tell him how to have one, or how to recognize it if he did".[21] In fact, perfectly intelligible, widely accepted, middle-of-the-road definitions of cognition exist. English and English, for instance, do not recommend the vague popular use "the awareness of objects", but they record without criticism the traditional meaning "a generic term for any process whereby an organism becomes aware or obtains knowledge of an object."[22] They quote also the behaviouristic definition "a hypothetical stimulus-stimulus association or perceptual organization inferred to account for expectancies".[24] The reader may care to ponder these defiintions, follow up the cross-references which English and English provide, and note that they say also of this term "Although it is part of the *traditional terminology* and has subjective connotations, many neobehaviourists use (it)".[25] If he does so, he will be well started on the way to judging how both "cosmic" and "scientific" psychologies may have their eccentricities, and how important the common element of common sense is.

More specifically, behaviouristic psychology, like that of George and his peers at the other extreme, is the end-result of a process. This process is that of working through the possible applications of a standpoint to the explanation of behaviour, with complete logic but incomplete common sense, and little if any humour in each case. The behaviouristic standpoint is this: that psychology must deal in terms of material fact, be philosophy-free, and enjoy entire immunity from intuition, feeling and what might be called the literary side of life in general. A statement (now itself historic) by J. B. Watson will indicate the basic doctrine which underlies all this: "It is granted that the behaviour of animals can be investigated without appeal to consciousness . . . The position is taken here that the behaviour of man and the behaviour of animals must be considered on the same plane . . .[26]

We have now shown the consequences of two extreme views of psychology, the one "old", speculative, and metaphysical, the other "new", experimental, and "non-metaphysical". Both, it has been shown, can run into the dangerous position of transgressing the deliverances of experience as expressed in common sense, and experiment is no safer than speculation, let alone anecdote, in this regard. So far the old psychology is at no disadvantage. But two more radical issues now face us. First, metaphysics: is the affirmation of this a merit or demerit in the old psychology? Can we find an optimum proportion of metaphysical thought in psychology which will justify us for criticizing George as over-metaphysical and Watson as under-metaphysical, all in the same breath. Second (and more important) can it be shown that there was a central body of "old psychology" which agreed on allowing metaphysics at this level, whatever other divergences it showed?

On the first issue, metaphysics has been defined as "that branch of philosophy concerned with the ultimate nature of existence".[27] This study, according to the writers quoted, has "no place in the science of psychology", and metaphysical is a term of reproach, "nearly always".[28] This would embrace propositions like those made by George about nothingness, and here we would have to agree. But English and English also recognize metapsychology. This, on one definition, is "a systematic attempt to deal with what lies beyond the empirical facts and laws of psychology"[29] It is "related to psychology as metaphysics was to physics in Aristotle's system"; it includes "the problems of relation of mind and body, of the place

of mind and behaviour in the cosmos, &c."[30] Curiously enough, English and English themselves refer elsewhere to the mind-body problem (the relation of mind, or that which is mental, to the body), as a metaphysical issue, going behind the empirical relationships to the ultimate one, often "unwittingly introduced" into psychology (and irrelevantly so, they argue) because of overlap between metaphysical and psychological terms.[31] This dictionary rightly reflects the major present day divergence of view on these matters. If one takes the position of some philosophers, that the problem is unreal, then one will side with Verplanck and Watson, to name only those we have mentioned, and "old" psychology is of no importance, though "old" physiology is. If, however, one allows that the mind-body problem is a real problem, and that the area called metapsychology is an area where meaningful propositions may be made, then the pre-experimental psychologies are worth considering, and while some may be erroneous, others may not.

Next, if you exclude mind (or soul or spirit for that matter) from psychology, you are assuming that it does not exist, *or* that its importance is negligible in relation to the understanding of behaviour, or that is is inaccessible to meaningful study, or possibly a variety of other things. In any case anti-metaphysical psychology assumes a metaphysical position, just as much as that which recognized metaphysics: in the study of human behaviour you cannot escape from the nature of things, and if you choose to ignore it you gravely limit the area of discourse. Our ancestors of a century ago were probably clearer on this point, for a dictionary then in current use recognizes that metaphysics can mean not only "*hyperphysical*, or that which is above and beyond nature", but also "if [meta] be interpreted, as it may, to mean *along with*, then *metaphysics* or metaphysical philosophy will be that philosophy which we should take *along with* us into physics, and into every other philosophy—that knowledge of causes and principles which we should carry with us into every department of inquiry"[32] This standpoint requires that you take the mind-body problem and the determinism-indeterminism problem with you into your psychology. But if you assume determinism, or deny mind, you have already limited the explanations you can give for behaviour.

Now ironically enough, Bain himself, who among the old psychologists is much honoured as the (unconscious) ancestor of behaviourism, did not allow metaphysics to prejudge psychological issues on the mind-body problem, though he did on determinism. Sometimes, indeed, he is accused of skating round the real body-mind problem. Those critics are more correct who remark that he "avoided the apparent crassness of a mechanistic system. He mades use of physiological principles for their practical usefulness, not for philosophical purposes".[33] The outcome of this, to follow R. S. Peters' version of Brett's famous history, is that Bain holds mind and body to be "one, a double-faced unity"; "We are to deal with this, in the language of the Athanasian Creed, not confounding the persons nor dividing the substance" (Bain's own words), and Bain was a true Aristotelian in his "grasp of the ideas of organism and activity".[34] Though his method was the method of natural history, Bain's psychology remains a psychology with a metaphysic behind it.

The pre-experimental psychology has now been shown, even if rather *en passant*, to have, at least in one of its central authors, not only a recognition of metaphysics, but discernible signs of kinship with Aristotle, the founding father of the whole discipline. Nevertheless, the question still remains, was there *an* old psychology different from the various new psychologies? The contrast between George and Bain would seem to indicate that there was not. However, a contrary view is possible. To demonstrate this, consider an author in some ways as different from Bain as is George. This was James McCosh, competitor with Bain for various academic appointments, Calvinist, whereas Bain was agnostic, a clergyman whereas Bain was anti-clerical, right-wing whereas Bain was radical. Now, McCosh (writing about the same time as Bain in the first edition of *The Emotions and the Will*) defined the task of psychology as inquiry "into the operations of the mind of man with the view of discovering its laws and its faculties".[35] The most important aspect of this task, in relation to our previous argument, is the relation of psychology to the other moral sciences in the performance of it. For McCosh, logic is the basic science of the laws of thought, and metaphysics that of the nature of being. But logic "throws us back on Psychology, not indeed to justify the laws, but to discover them",[36] nor can metaphysics "attain anything like a scientific form, till psychology has made some progress, and taught us to distinguish between intuition and associated and allied states of mind".[37] Psychology, here, is in the midst of the moral sciences, in the role not of master, nor servant, but of partner. Bain would not admit intuition in the same way as does McCosh, but he would agree on the need for the distinction between it and allied states. Moreover, Bain admits and stresses "consciousness, or the immediate feeling of the mind's doings".[38] This is an allied state (immediate feeling), though Bain remarks that "this has been too much looked upon by metaphysicians as the main source" of "knowledge respecting the Human Mind".[39]

Bain's two other sources, however, although diverging from those of McCosh, agree with those favoured in even less likely quarters. His recognition of the "anatomy and physiology of the human framework"[40] as a source of information about the mind, has already been noticed under other names: it forms a link with the physiologically minded psychologists from the eighteenth century (at least) to Watson. The difference is that the materialists and behaviourists did not keep this source in perspective as Bain did, and tried to reduce the products of the others to it. On the other side, Bain's emphasis on this third source, "Outward appearances, actions, and works", provides links with writers who themselves err by sectional over-emphasis. Thus Comte tried to reject introspection and the deliverances of consciousness in general and to reduce psychology to biology plus a social science yet to be developed, thus emphasizing two of Bain's three sources to the detriment of the third.[41] Other pre-experimental psychologists who overstressed the introspective sources could easily be cited besides George.

Once this principle of the three necessary sources of psychological knowledge is established, the central tradition of the old psychology becomes clear. This tradition considers events in life-histories as acts of whole creatures, not bits of behaviour, it accepts the organism as a unit, it listens to what talking organisms say about themselves, it has a place for the study of cultural artifacts as well as the twitching of muscles, for description of the phenomena of mind, as well as for the reporting of behaviour. On this basis, the alleged change from old to new with the coming of experiment appears rather as a suppression of one or two of the sources in the interest of "science", or of introspection, or of any other point of view or method of gathering information. Admitting this, the old or perennial psychology, the psychology of the three sources, is well represented in the days before Wundt, for instance by G. H. Lewes, Herbert Spencer, Lotze, and many more whom one would even less expect to see bracketed together. On this showing, there is a place in it for Wundt and Brentano, though many other famous reputations would need some re-valuing. This is material for future studies, however: for the moment it must be enough to have sketched the *prima facie* contrast between pre-experimental and experimental psychology, to have indicated that this contrast is not quite what it seems, and to have argued that the old psychology is in fact a perennial one, dependent on the recognition of the three sources which have been mentioned.

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[6] LIDDELL, H. S., *op. cit.*, p. 51. Also in Klein (to whom I am indebted for the reference), *op. cit.*, p. 309.

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[8] BAIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

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[10] See THOULESS, R. H.—*General and Social Psychology.* London: Univ. Tutorial Press, 1937, pp. 8-14, Thouless castigates "fantastic anecdote", a "pre-scientific method", consisting in the "use of an anecdote which is not an account of an actual event, but of one invented by the writer for the purpose of his argument" (*op. cit.*, p. 10). English and English are slightly less severe on anecdotalism. They say, under *anecdotal evidence*: "casually observed incidents. The evidence is seldom reportable in sufficient detail to be trusted for generalizations, but it is often a source of hypotheses for further investigation" (*op. cit.* p. 30).

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[29] *Op. cit.*, p. 320.

[30] *Loc. cit.*

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[39] *Loc. cit.*

[40] BAIN, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

[41] See on this, CARDNO, J. A. Auguste Comte's Psychology, *Psychol. Reports*, 1958, 4, 423-430.