

The Postulates of a Structural Psychology[1]
W. Caldwell (1899)

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By W. Caldwell (1899)

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This article is a manifesto of importance to all students of psychology and philosophy. Its question has become one of general importance,[2] and Professor Titchener, by virtue of his recognized achievements in his chosen field of psychology, and by virtue of his general official prominence, is more than entitled to deal authoritatively with conceptions about the scope and method and material results of experimental psychology.

I. The chief gains that accrue from this paper are due to what may naturally be called its epistemological[3] point of view. I do not altogether like to put the matter thus, for I do not wish to lose light of the positive psychology that it contains, or of its author's statement of its 'main object.' And I also wish to do all I can to remove the erroneous impression that, 'of course, philosophers never will make any serious attempt to get: really inside the psychological point of view.' Mr. Titchener's epistemological point of view is defined in the first third of his paper in regard to the scope and the divisions of psychological science, and in the second two-thirds in regard to what he [p. 188] himself calls the nature and number of the structural elements of mind. As an outcome of the first part we recognize how true were the words of Mr. Stout, in his preface to his Analytic Psychology, about the coming of the time when no one man would any more think of writing a book upon psychology in general than he would think of writing a book upon mathematics in general. (A) Mr. Titchener distinguishes for us, with the help of biological considerations, (1) the psychology of structure or structural psychology, (2) the psychology of function or functional (descriptive) psychology, (3) ontogenetic psychology, (4) taxonomic psychology, (5) social psychology, (6) phylogenetic psychology. A 'very large portion of experimental psychology' is really structural or morphological psychology; it is a 'vivisection which shall yield structural, not functional results.' This is Mr. Titchener's chosen domain -- the discovery of "what is there [in 'mind'] and in what quantity, not what it is there for." His own Outline, he would have us infer, deals with the first of the six different brands of psychology.

(B) "There can be no doubt that much of the criticism passed upon the new psychology depends upon the critic's failure to recognize its morphological character." Surely, then, no one in the future will criticise experimental psychology for not giving us what it does not profess to give. Indeed, we shall not do so if the said experimental psychology keep rigidly to its own point of view. (C) Mr. Titchener again tells us that structural psychology has not yet come to an agreement about more than the psychology of sensation and the constitution of the sensation element. He himself regards, as we know, the affection process to be also an elemental process. A majority of psychologists do this, he says, there being a minority who do not. "It is natural, in view of the intrinsic difficulty of the subject, that the psychology of feeling should be in a less settled state than the psychology of sensation." Going up higher, the 'anatomy of functional complexes,' i.e., the structural study of the 'higher [mental] process,' the 'perceptions and emotions and actions handed down in popular and psychological tradition,' is as yet *** a 'mere plan of arrangement.' (D) As to the second way in which the epistemological point of view is applied: "The elements of the experimentalists, as they themselves have been the first to acknowledge, are artifacts, abstractions, usefully isolated for

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scientific ends, but not found in experience save as connected with their like." This is emphatic enough. Let us not any more go to experimentalists and say: 'Your sensations and affections and volitions and emotions are very different things [p. 189] from what we actually experience, are just so many poor, thin, caricatures of the organic experiences we feel in daily life.' He can reply to us that he is dealing with the structural phases of these processes, and that for more than that we had better betake ourselves to some of his colleagues. Now I think that I understand these four points. Let me look at some of their consequences, for I must be brief.

II. (1) As far as in him lies, should not a structural psychologist observe that accuracy of confinement within his own proper sphere that he request his critics to think about before attacking him? Mr. Titchener says things about functional psychology that may be questioned. (a) "It cannot be said that this functional psychology, despite what we may call its greater obviousness to investigation, has been worked out with as much patient enthusiasm or with as much scientific accuracy as has the psychology of mind structure." Far be it from me to compare the zeal or the patience of a body of men from the time of Aristotle to that of the English associationists with that of the heroic pioneers and workers in the experimental psychology of this century, but I shrug my shoulders and ask about the standard of 'scientific accuracy' implied in the preceding and the following sentence. "But it is also true that the methods of descriptive psychology cannot, in the nature of the case, lead to results of scientific finality." Finality on any one plane of investigation is a different thing from finality along some other plane. Lefoito dan 'ikanws, ei kata thn 'upukeimenhn 'ulhn diasafhqein. Mr. Titchener's conception of science in this article is, I think, to be inferred from his phrase about the arrival of the 'time' for 'the transformation [of psychology] from philosophy to science.' He means experimental science, as that is ordinarily understood, consequently he has no right to judge of functional psychology merely from his standpoint. And if some of his words in this article (to which I shall immediately refer) about the last things of mind were true, some of his other four psychological disciplines would also be 'in the air,' -- be absolutely unscientific.

(b) Ought not a structural psychologist -- and this point is even more vital -- to be able to adhere rigidly to his 'structural' point of view, at least within the realm of his own observation and scientific disputation? I will adduce one or two reasons for saying that I do not find Mr. Titchener to do this. (i) He uses the expressions 'elemental processes' (457), and 'elements' (455, 462), and 'last things of mind' -- I will not say interchangeably, but at least in a manner that makes it difficult for the reader to keep the 'structural' view persistently in [p. 190] sight. I am only too painfully aware of the imperfections of language to press this point, although I cannot overlook it nor fail to see its influence in wrecking his own argument. I will, therefore, supplement it by saying that perhaps he ought to be held responsible (b) only for the use of the two 'elements' called with admirable precision the sensation-element and the affection-element. These two things bear the weight of his whole article. He is endeavoring to set forth the structural 'elements' (450, 453) in the elementary mental processes. And his result is (462): "The affection-element is constituted of quality, intensity and duration; the sense-element (sensation or idea) of quality, intensity, duration, clearness, and (in some cases) extent." But quality, intensity, duration, etc., are not elements; they are characteristics or categories [of sensation and affection]. That is, despite his words constituted (and constituents (p. 450)), he does not analyze the sensation-element or the affection-element into simpler elements. Nor are the sensation-element and the affection-element themselves elements; they are processes or phases of processes. (Mr. Titchener uses the word processes again and again on pp. 457-8-9, and he compares his elementary processes to other alleged 'processes,' such as will-processes, etc.) Now are processes, or phases of processes, facts of structure or facts of sequence? I think that they are facts of sequence. Indeed, the very fact of process is not a fact of 'structure,' but something more than this. In short, Mr. Titchener does not succeed in maintaining the structural point of view throughout the central sections of his article. (g) Terminology and statement apart, Mr. Titchener does not, in disputation, keep to his own confession that the 'elements of the experimentalists are artifacts, abstractions.' He uses them as if they were real things, and does battle with them against all other 'candidates' for 'elemental rank,' such as alleged will-process. He uses them not merely 'for scientific ends' but for dogmatic and ontological purposes. "What (459) is our justification for looking upon them [these different processes,' preceding sentence] as last things of mind?" How, I ask, can an 'artifact' be a last thing of mind? A last thing of mind might, e.g., be the connection which Mr. Titchener tells us always exists between these elements, but not the element as an 'artifact.[4]

III. What I do find in Mr. Titchener's article is a double point of view about structural psychology. (1) The conception of structural psychology as denoting the accredited results of a certain point of view

regarding mental process or processes, to wit, the point of view characterized by the categories of quality, intensity, quantity, duration, etc. (2) The conception of structural psychology as depending upon certain peculiarities in its object-matter, to wit, that its object-matter is mental 'elements,' irreducibles of some kind or other. I think that the first point of view is successfully set forth by Mr. Titchener as the point of view adopted by experimental psychology, and, in general, it is my opinion that experimental psychology should seek to differentiate itself from the other five psychologies, not by its subject-matter (for surely its hope is to treat all mental processes experimentally), but by its point of view -- its 'categories.' And I think that the second point of view breaks down in Mr. Titchener's own hands. This is enough for my purpose. Of course, I believe that it will break down in anybody's hands.

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Footnotes

[1] Cf. the article by E. B. Titchener. *Philosophical Review*, September, 1898, pp. 449-465.

[2] Professor Titchener informs us in a note, occupying the half of his first page, that his article 'contains a part' of his 'reply' to a criticism (published in this *REVIEW*, July, 1898) of his 'view of the psychological self,' made by me at the 1897 meeting of the American Psychological Association. His article has a value independently of that criticism of mine, and I shall not in the main speak of it as a reply to my criticism. My criticism was not so much of his 'psychological self,' as such, as of the fact that he did not seem to me to allow, in his treatment of the 'psychological self,' for some admissions that he made in certain general portions of the book. His present article opens up some important epistemological considerations which at once generalize and dignify our 'discussion.' It is, at the present moment, idle to deplore or ignore methodological and plain statements regarding psychology and psychological facts. There are not wanting signs, in a recent article (this *REVIEW* for November, 1898) by Professor Münsterberg, that he too has felt their necessity in dealing with some of his 'English' and 'foreign' co-workers and critics. The 'discussion,' too, of Professors Baldwin and Dewey in the November number of the *Philosophical Review*, certainly turns upon epistemological considerations regarding psychology.

[3] Professor Münsterberg uses this word, *loc. cit.*

[4] I purposely overlook Mr. Titchener's 'anatomical' reasons for regarding sensation and affection as last things of mind. The 'irreducibility' test and the physiology test yield different results to different psychologists, and would yield different results to Mr. Titchener's six psychologists. Mr. Baldwin, a. g., representing Mr. Titchener's fifth kind of psychology, claims that the mind cannot think of itself save as one term of a social relation. The inability of mind, if real, is a last thing about the mind, just as much as the perception of color. In one regard it is a 'complex' fact; in another it is a simple and irreducible fact. The physiology test, again, yields the fact of function as a last thing about mind. A physiological expert, e.g., Mr. J. S. Haldane, insists (*Nin. Cent.*, Sept. '98) on the difference between physiological and mechanical processes, by holding that physiology studies vital functions. All this shows that no one kind of psychology is entitled to talk about the last things of the mind.

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