

Psychology as Science of Self
I. Is The Self Body Or Has It Body?
Mary Whiton Calkins (1908a)

Classics in the History of Psychology

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I. Is The Self Body Or Has It Body?

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THE main results so far reached by this discussion are the following: I have defined psychology in a provisional way as science of consciousness and have pointed out that, as thus regarded, it may more definitely be conceived (1) as science of ideas or contents, often [p. 13] named structural psychology, or (2) as science of mental functions, so-called functional psychology, or, finally, (3) as science of the conscious self. I have; then insisted that the third form of psychology is really fundamental to the others and implied by both of them. An idea-as-such, I have argued, is a needlessly artificial abstraction every idea is experienced as idea-of-a-conscious-possessor-of-ideas. And, similarly, a mental function is experienced as activity of a mental functioner or agent. Such a possessor of ideas, or mental functioner, may best be called a self; and I have next, therefore, to discuss the nature of the self.

Among the different views of the "self," or mental functioner, as object of scientific psychological study, there are two which stand out sharply in contemporary discussion. The first identifies the self, an mental functioner, with the psychophysical organism -- in a word, it conceives the self as mind-in-body or mind-plus-body: according to this view, body constitutes part of self. The second theory conceives of self as non-inclusive of body: according to this view, body is not part of self, though it may well be regarded as closely related to self. On the basis of these two theories of the psychologist's self, there are three distinguishable forms of self-psychology. (1) In the first place, the self may be conceived as psychophysical organism and psychology may be regarded as science of the processes or functions of the conscious body, the mind-and-body-complex. This seems to me to be the practical procedure of most of our present day functional psychologists -- especially it seems to be the conclusion of American psychologists. The use of the term "self" in this sense is expressly sanctioned by Professor Angell in his most recent paper.[1] The objection to this view is the following: in regarding mind and body as together making up a complex the psychologist compounds phenomena which are in great degree distinct, and he thus fails to account for the admitted distinction of the functions of the so-called psychophysical organism. If it were justifiable to regard mind and body as compounded, or united, in a psychophysical organism, then all the functions of this organism should be neither physiological nor psychical, but themselves psychophysical. Functional psychologists, however, though they point to certain psychophysical functions -- such as selection, adaptation, variation -- yet never escape the necessity of distinguishing from these the "purely psychical" and the "merely physiological" functions. Implicitly or explicitly, they all perforce agree with Angell in admitting the existence of "dominantly physiological functions . . . assimilation, reproduction, motion," which they distinguish from "the categories" -- sensibility, for instance -- "appropriate to the psychical [p. 14] alone." [2] But if it is still necessary to distinguish psychical from physiological functions, nothing seems gained by the doctrine that the functioner is psychophysical. It is surely quite as simple and more logical to admit the existence of a psychical functioner of psychic functions in close relation to a physical functioner of physical functions than to insist on the identity of the two functioners while yet one is obliged to distinguish the two groups of functions as radically different.

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(2) A second, logically possible form of self-psychology would regard the self, or mental functioner as mind-without-body, self unrelated to body. So far as I know, nobody nowadays champions this doctrine and I should not take time to mention it were it not that Professor Angell attributes it to me. "Such a functional psychology," he says, "as I have been presenting would be entirely reconcilable with Miss Calkins's 'psychology of selves' . . . were it not for her extreme scientific conservatism in refusing to allow the self to have a body, save as a kind of conventional biological ornament. The real psychological self, as I understand her, is pure disembodied spirit" It ought not to be necessary for me to explain that I have never held, or meant to teach, a psychology of disembodied spirit. I do indeed believe that it is possible to analyze, classify, and (in a sense) to explain psychic phenomena without reference to their physiological or biological correlates: in other words, I hold, with Professor Warren, that "psychological investigation can be carried on without . . . physiological research."^[3] But the intimate connection, to ordinary observation, of psychical and physical -- the facts that certain psychical phenomena, notably perceptions, are inexplicable psychologically and yet in close relation to physical phenomena, and that still other phenomena, as those of "instinctive" liking and interests, are biologically, not psychologically, explicable -- these considerations speak unequivocally against a. conception of psychic self its unrelated to body.

(3) The third view (and the one which I hold) of the psychologist's self regards the self as distinct from body, but related to it. Thus, so far from "refusing to allow the self to have a body," I insist that it precisely has a body, and does not consist in body, is not made up of body-and-mind. This procedure avoids the difficulty, already stated, of the psychophysical organism conception which, however successful in uniting two functioners, loses all the value of the union since it has still to distinguish two sorts of functions, psychical and physiological. And, positively, this conception of the [p. 15] self as having body, related to body, may be enriched by all the facts, physiological and biological of functional psychology. That is to say, it is germane to self-psychology both to teach that the bodily phenomena which regularly accompany consciousness have values in the perpetuation of biological individual and of race, and to show that certain physical facts are the regular antecedent or accompaniments of certain facts of consciousness. "Such a settlement of the issue," Angell would object, "is easy and logically consistent. But does it not leave us with a gulf set between the self as mind and tire self as body for the crossing of which we are forthwith obliged to spend much needless energy, as the gulf is of oar own inventing?"^[4] To this objection I should answer: first, I do not think that the gulf is of our own inventing. As scientists, we have to start out from the standpoint of every-day adult consciousness and for this the distinction between mind and body is already clearly made. And, secondly, I can not admit that undue energy is needed to cross the gulf. As psychologists, once more, use are not, concerned with the philosophical problem of the relation of mind and body; we take for granted the existence of the two, and their relation, on the ground of observation behind which we, as scientists, have no business to probe. It is perfectly simple to treat the relation between psychical and physical as that of concomitance, antecedence, or consequence, without taking sides with interactionist, parallelist, epiphenomenalist, or panpsychist. And, finally, as I have so often insisted, this "gulf" between psychical and physical must be bridged not only by upholders of this doctrine of "the self which has body," but by advocates of the psychophysical organism doctrine. The difference is simply that: the gulf lies, in the one case, between self and body and, in the other ease, between purely mental function and physiological function.

In insisting that self-psychology, conceived as science of the "conscious self which has body," is in essential harmony with the characteristic teachings of functional psychology, I am delighted to find myself in substantial agreement with Professor Judd, as I read his recently published "Psychology." The book "aims" explicitly "to develop a functional view of mental life" and yet it teaches that "psychology deals with the self."^[5] The self, Dr. Judd definitely teaches, is not "independent in its development of bodily organs." Yet, the self certainly is not, as conceived by Judd, a mere psychophysical organism. It is "the center of all possible forms of relationship . . . to other selves, to the physical world, . . . to all other phases of known reality It is characterized," Professor [p. 16] Judd adds, "by a unique type of activity which . . . we describe when we use the word 'consciousness.'"

The conclusion that the self, or the basal fact of psychology, stands in close relation to its body, presses the question: What, more precisely, is the nature of this relation? Differently phrased, the question may read: What reference shall the psychologist make to physical phenomena? In order to answer this question it is necessary to ask more generally wherein adequate scientific procedure consists. The task of any scientist is twofold: first, to describe or portray and, secondly, so far as possible to explain the phenomena which he treats. Observation, analysis, and classification are,

taken together, the main factors of scientific description; and psychological description, "the exact portrayal of conscious life," involves keen observation of the psychic fact, complete analysis of it into its constituent factors, and adequate classification of it by its likeness and unlikeness to other phenomena. Explanation, in the narrowly scientific sense, consists in the discovery of the additional phenomena, psychic and physical, to which a given psychic fact is related (otherwise than by its likeness or its difference). This other phenomenon may itself be a psychic fact --as when a memory is "explained" as due to repeated perception; or it may be a fact of another order physical (in the narrow sense), or physiological, or biological. It will be observed that nothing in this conception essentially contradicts the doctrine that science is always descriptive, never explanatory an answer always to the question "how?" not to the question "why?"[6] For the kind of explanation which such a doctrine excludes froth science is explanation of the ultimate, metaphysical sort, not explanation conceived as a tracing of antecedent and consequent or of simultaneous correlates. One further statement must be made with reference to the ideal scientific explanation. Such an explanation would serve to classify the phenomena which it explained. For phenomena may be grouped and classified not only according to their internal likenesses and unlikenesses, but also with reference to the likenesses and differences of the phenomena which explain them.

This simple distinction, rather generally admitted, between explanation and description indicates clearly, I think, the part which physiology and biology -- and, to less degree, physics -- have to play in psychology. It is clear that psychic phenomena are incapable of scientific analysis into non-psychical factors: an emotion can no more be described by an enumeration of the frontal lobe excitations, the [p. 17] contractions of unstriped muscles, and the instinctive attitudes which precede or accompany it than a picture can be described by an account of tire mixing of the pigments used in painting it. On the other hand, it has become increasingly evident that psychic phenomena may be (in the scientific sense already outlined) more or less adequately explained by linking them with physical, physiological, and biological phenomena. It is not possible in the limits of my space to consider in detail the adequacy and extent of these explanations, but a few more specific comments are needed. The explanation of facts of consciousness by physical phenomena is admitted to hold only partially. It is possible to distinguish sensational consciousness front every other sort, as that which follows primarily on physical stimulation, and to differentiate most forms of sensational stimulus from each other; but no close correspondence van be traced between the physical and the psychical. In particular, a simple physical stimulus (as colored light) often conditions a complex sensational experience, whereas a highly complex stimulus (white light, for example) may be the antecedent of relatively simple sense consciousness.

The explanation of psychic fact by physiological is a far more adequate procedure. The account of sensational consciousness as correlated with the excitation of end organs and of fixed parts of the central nervous system and as regularly accompanied by characteristic muscular contractions[7] represents the most assured results of this method of explanation, but fruitful theories abound with reference to the physiological accompaniments of affective and even of relational and volitional consciousness. The insufficiency of the purely physiological explanation must, however, be admitted. In the first place, much of it is avowed hypothesis -- it can not, for example, be claimed that any physiological explanation of the sensation of pain, or of the consciousness of extensity, or of the affective experience is at present stably assured. It is evident, in the second place, that the physiological explanations are entirely inadequate to the classification of psychic phenomena. For even granting that distinctions in physiological accompaniment mark off from each other the large divisions of our conscious experience, no such distinctions can be found corresponding with the finer differentiations of the conscious life. By aid of physiology one may indeed dis- [p. 18] tinguish perception from imagination, visual from auditory imagination, and (less certainly) imagination from thought, and both imagination and thought from emotion. But no one has ever suggested a distinction of connecting fibers or of association centers which provides a reasonable basis for the clearly marked difference between discrimination and generalization or between egoistic and sympathetic joy.

The relation of biological to psychological phenomena has finally to be considered. The biological conception of consciousness is that of a reaction-to-environment which is, on the whole, beneficial, and is either immediate or delayed, either an adaptation or an interference. From the point of view of the biologist this may appear to be a description of consciousness, but to the psychologist it is evident that one gives no account of consciousness-as-such by naming it useful reaction, whether accommodating or selective, to environment. Really to describe consciousness, one must recognize it as, let us say, dominantly sensational or affective, as receptive or assertive, as individualizing, and

as "egoistic." But while biology can furnish us no description of consciousness, it goes farther in providing us with explanations (in the sense already made clear). This becomes evident through a study of biological phenomena -- in particular, of organic reactions and attitudes. The main distinction made here by biologists and by biological (often called functional) psychologists is the familiar one between (1) immediate or "short circuit" organic responses and (2) delayed or "long circuit" responses.[8] From this point of view our relatively simple sensational and affective experiences are explained as accompaniment or result of immediate organic responses and are thus definitely marked off from thought, emotion, and the volitional consciousness -- experiences of which the characteristic antecedents or correlates are complex attitudes and delayed activities. It is evident that the immediate response to environment is necessary to the preservation and perpetuation of primitive and relatively undifferentiated organisms and that it is similarly a useful sort of reaction for the developed organism in many phases of its life; and it is equally obvious that the delayed reaction is essential to the survival, and consequently to the propagation, of the complex organism which has need to respond in varying fashion to surroundings of various sorts. Within this second group, that of the delayed reactions, it is possible, also, to make further differentiations. One may, as already indicated, distinguish reactions which are mere adaptations to environment from those which in some way alter or control the environment; one may also distinguish reactions of advance from reactions of withdrawal; and one may, finally, characterize given organic responses according as they are the continuations or the interruptions of preceding reactions. Emotional activities may, for example, be regarded as interruptions both of habitual and of simple voluntary responses;[9] and then, within this group of delayed and interrupting reactions, rage may be explained as an emotion characterized by its reaction of advance, tending to interfere with the environment, and making for self-preservation; liking may be explained as an emotion accompanied by an adaptive reaction of advance, which makes for the perpetuation of the race; fear as all emotion correlated with an adaptive movement of withdrawal, which is essential to self preservation. Of course, all these characteristic attitudes and reactions may be regarded as survivals of the instinctive responses of primitive organisms

But it is obvious, once more, that this procedure, however illuminating does not suffice to differentiate all distinguishable forms of consciousness -- in other words, that the biological conception (whether conceived as explanation or as description) does not furnish a sufficient classification of psychic phenomena. The function of emotion as a whole may indeed be distinguished from that of reasoning, and the function of joy from that of grief, the function of love from that of hate. But it certainly is not possible to differentiate, on the basis of function alone, between, let us say, memory and imagination or between malice and envy. There is, in truth, no need to argue this point, for all "biological" psychologists make some use of other-than-biological distinctions in their classification of consciousness that is, they treat the biological as supplementary to the generally instinctively psychological procedure. Angell, indeed, admitting "the paucity of the basic modes" of biological utility, argues that the biological method is valuable precisely "by virtue of the strong relief into which it throws the fundamental resemblances of processes often unduly severed for psychological analysis." [10] This means, of course, that the biological explanation of phenomena of consciousness, important as it is, is insufficient as a discrimination of distinguishable facts from each other.

The general conclusions of our examination of these non-psychical principles of explanation are thus the following: on the one hand, it is evident that all ideally complete psychology must take account of those facts of physics, physiology, and biology which border on the domain of psychology. To neglect these groups of phenomena would be, indeed, to overlook the obvious relations of [p. 20] consciousness to the rest of reality; and this neglect would involve, also, a loss for psychology of fruitful methods and applications. For precisely because physiological conditions and organic reactions are more directly and often more readily controllable than psychic states a knowledge of them may have both methodological and practical value. On the other hand, it has been shown, first, that the physical, physiological, and biological explanations of psychic phenomena are -- many of them -- insufficiently established and hypothetical in nature, and, secondly, that they afford an insufficient classification of psychic phenomena.

But apart from these criticisms on the success of these explanations of psychic phenomena in non-psychic terms, it must be expressly reiterated that such explanations, however complete and well verified, can never exhaust the procedure of the psychologist, that they are indeed subsidiary to his basal purpose, the description, or portrayal, of the psychic fact. "The distinctive aim of the psychologist," in the words of Professor Stout, "is to investigate mental, events themselves, not their

mechanical accompaniments or antecedents." [11] The distinctions between ether and air vibration, between rod and cone excitation, between short-circuit and long-circuit response, or even between self-preserving and race-perpetuating activity, are not distinctions within consciousness. Such distinctions may, indeed, serve to group facts of consciousness, but they form no part of a description of facts of consciousness. In other words, these non-psychological principles of explanation, useful as they are, are supplementary to the description of conscious experiences by psychological analysis." [12]

Footnotes

[1] *The Province of Functional Psychology*, loc. cit., p. 82 and note.

[2] *Op cit.*, pp. 76-77.

[3] C. Warren, "The Fundamental Functions of Consciousness," *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. III., p. 218.

[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 82, note.

[5] *Psychology General Introduction*, p. 315. Cf. pp. 310-311.

[6] Cf. K. F. Pearson, *The Grammar of Science*, 2d ed., pp. 306, 332, 344 et al.

[7] The "biological" psychologists (the prevailing American type, as has appeared, of functional psychologists) often assume that the study of muscular reactions belongs exclusively to them, and accuse the physiological psychologists of a too exclusive concern with afferent fibers and nerve centers. The truth is, of course, that the conception of contracting muscles and of body in motion is, at base, physiological, becoming biological when supplemented by the notion of organic adaptation.

[8] Cf. Angell, *The Province of Functional Psychology*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

[9] Cf. John Dewey, "The Theory of Emotion," *Psychological Review*, Vol. II. pp. 13 ff.; Angell, "Psychology," pp. 321 ff.

[10] *The Province of Functional Psychology*, loc. cit., pp. 741 and 733.

[11] *Analytic psychology*, I., p. 3.

[12] For brief treatment of explanation in psychical terms, cf. a later paper of this series. Because of the limits of my space, I do not here refer to Münsterberg's theory, that description is communication and that communication is only possible in terms of physical objects, since only such are sharable by several subjects. To this it may, I think, be objected: first, that description does not logically involve communication -- one might, in other words, be a scientist-in-solitude; secondly, that the difficulty is rather philosophical than psychological, and that the psychologist may properly assume a parallel experience in other selves.

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