

The Proper Affiliation of Psychology: With Philosophy or the Natural Sciences.

James Gibson Hume (1909)

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The Proper Affiliation of Psychology: With Philosophy or the Natural Sciences.

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[Abstract of paper presented at the fourth annual meeting of the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, , December, 1908.][*]

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Philosophy and psychology are affiliated in the Southern Society, and in the we do not divorce them.

Certain ultra-scientific psychologists, identifying philosophy with obsolete medieval metaphysics, naturally do not wish any affiliation. They can provide for philosophy under the sub-division 'Psychology of illusions and aberrations.' 'Psychology without a soul', means psychology without metaphysics. We may get along without medieval quibblings about occult essences. Pre-Kantian philosophy repudiated and refuted this dogmatic analytic method, Kant and his successors developed a better method and a more adequate metaphysic. It is as legitimate to distinguish modern philosophy from medievalism as it is to distinguish chemistry from alchemy, astronomy from astrology.

If the soul in question is the one David Hume could not 'catch,' the 'simple substance' demolished in Kant's 'Paralogisms,' we can get along without it also. But Kant reinstated another self or ego in his 'unity of apperception' and 'practical reason,' an organizing function within experience. This we cannot afford to lose. If we have a self within experience we do not need a second one beyond it. Those who are most vigorous in repudiating metaphysics usually reject idealistic metaphysics and adopt materialistic metaphysics instead. A mechanical explanation allows for no distinction between good and evil; it also takes away the distinction between true and false, fact and fancy; as each so-called fancy is as necessarily determined, it is therefore as legitimate as any so-called fact. This destroys science. Hence, materialistic metaphysics ought to be as obsolete as medievalism.

A state of consciousness may be dealt with abstractly, scientifically, and atomically,

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nevertheless in actuality it is an integral part of a continuum of living, synthesizing, conscious process. [p. 66]

Philosophy and psychology are really complementary. They deal with the warp and woof of the same undivided concrete human experience. Psychology turns special attention to the content and its analysis, philosophy to the organization or synthesis of this same content. Hence, psychology without philosophy is blind, philosophy without psychology is empty.

Experimental psychology has a perfect right to be ranked with the exact sciences; it shares with mathematics the work of making other sciences more exact, nevertheless it is closely bound up with philosophy. Both start from the same data of directly given actual human experience and on this common ground overlap. Further, the philosopher must cultivate the psychological soil if he would gather philosophical fruit; and the psychologist, after getting his scientific results, if he would interpret their meaning must philosophize.

Footnote

[*] *Classics Editor's note: This paper was Hume's discussion of the Presidential Address of J. MacBride Sterrett, entitled "The Proper Affiliation of Psychology." The full address ultimately appeared in the 1909 volume of Psychological Review, 16, 85-106. The abstract of the address appeared immediately above that of Hume's discussion, and is reproduced below in full.*

The Proper Affiliation of Psychology; President's Address. J. MACBRIDE STERRITT.

In the Library of Congress one finds the works on Empirical Psychology classified under the division of Physiology. Kant, in the second edition of his Critique, says that empirical psychology 'must be placed by the side of empirical physics or physics proper.' Hitherto it has been classed with the philosophical disciplines. Has there been any change in both the methods and the subject-matter to justify its breaking away from its traditional affiliation with philosophy?

Note is made of the discussion of the topic at the meeting of the American Philosophical Association at Harvard in 1907, -- also of the fact that the American Psychological Association last year chose to meet in affiliation with the American Society of Naturalists in Chicago rather than with the American Philosophical Association at Cornell, -- and of the fact that the A.A.S. puts in the program, Section H, Anthropology and Psychology. By common consent, rational psychology and the modern forms of the old introspective psychology go with philosophy. But how shall the new psychology be classified?

Submitting with a protest to the modern sectarian definition of science we can classify all forms of psychology as (1) the old, unscientific psyche-psychology; (2) the new scientific hypo-psyche-psychology.

Examination is made of structural, functional and genetic psychology as forms of the new science. It is found that their nature, aims, methods, and largely their subject-matter, are quite akin to those of the natural sciences.

It is found that consciousness as an entity or activity, and as the subject-matter of the science, is discarded.

It is held that all forms of non-psyche-psychology should be affiliated with the natural sciences. Kant is quoted on the subject from both the first and second editions of his *Critique*. Again, the new [p. 65] science is distinguished from the other philosophical disciplines in being a causal rather than a normative science.

A plea is entered for the old introspective psychology as the logical form of any psychology -- a plea for its work, life and title. If the old psychology be termed metaphysics the new science may well be termed Hypo-psychics.

George Trumbull Ladd also commented on Sterrett's address. It, too, is reproduced here in full.

It seems to me that psychology may properly become affiliated, or come into brotherly relations, with every form of science where there is a promise of mutual helpfulness. If we look upward to philosophy, we see that psychology has very special relations with it. These relations I have tried to express by calling psychology the proper 'propædeutic' to philosophy. By this I mean that the endeavor to solve the more difficult and deeper problems connected with a theory of the nature and development of the mental life, leads us straight to all the main problems of philosophy, as the supreme form of reflective thinking. Besides, there is no other practical introduction, or discipline preparatory to philosophy, which equals the study of psychology.

If now we look downward and outward we see how psychology may properly become affiliated with all the physical and natural sciences. With the strictly chemico-physical sciences, its affiliations are more remote and indirect, and are chiefly through psycho-physics, physiology, and the so-called anthropological and sociological sciences, of which psychology itself is, perhaps, the most important part. These all contribute to our knowledge of the conditions under which, the environment in the midst of which, and the efficient secondary causes in response to which, the life of the mind begins and develops. For example, psycho-physics may claim the whole territory in which lies the complex science of how the different qualities and intensities of nature's forces arouse, control, and determine the character of the history of the evolution of mind.

But when we have said all this by way of cheerful concession, and even grateful acknowledgment, to these sciences for their help, we [p. 67] have by no means the right to surrender an independent sphere and special, high importance to psychology, as properly understood. For a true psychology never is, and never can be, anything less than that science which deals with the description, and explanation, and theoretical construction, 'of the facts of consciousness, *as such*' -- that is, as facts of consciousness. It is in *these* facts that psychology finds its data. It is *these* facts which the science aims to explain and interpret in terms of a defensible theory of the mind's true nature and actual life of development. If now we examine the claims of physiology, or biology, to absorb and dominate psychology, rather than affiliate with it properly, we find that these sciences are in certain parts -- as, notably, the so-called physiology of the sense-organs, and of the central nervous system,-- largely themselves borrowers from psychology.

In this connection I wish to protest against the current use of such words as 'the subconscious,' or 'the unconscious,' and the accompanying attempt to discredit the value and uses of self-consciousness and introspection in psychology. The truth is that these phrases stand for a *purely* negative conception, a negation of all attempt to think or to know. Such words as 'infinite' and 'absolute,' when properly used, are never 'purely' negative conceptions. An infinite line, *quoad* line, is as much a line as is one a foot or a yard long. And I am simply amazed at the speaker or writer who imagines himself to be exploiting science when he is telling, in terms of consciousness, how the world would seem to a conscious seer of its processes, when as yet no sight, no seer, no consciousness were existent. Surely, here is the place for an invincible agnosticism. It is doubtless somewhat disturbing to see how, at the present time, psychology as properly understood and properly affiliated, is being in certain quarters discredited and derided as being quite too 'old-fashioned' to claim the attention of the well-equipped, modern scientific man. But we old-fashioned fellows must continue in our effort to affiliate with all these helpful sciences, while not relaxing our grasp upon our own proper science; and bear with patience and good nature all our rebuffs. Those who are somewhat

excited and even mentally awry over "the triumphs of the so-called 'new psychology' will recover in time. And, indeed, there is after all only the same old human mind, which may be studied, however, with the help of many new affiliations.

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