

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF NORMAL AND  
ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY**

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CHAPTER XI

**THE UNITARY EXPERIENCE OF VOLUNTARISM**

In the course of our discussion, we had again and again to refer to the data and postulates of psychology. It would be well to give now a short review of them so as to bring them clearly before the mind of the reader. The fact that the postulates are not kept clearly in view leads one to commit many a fallacy.

Psychology assumes the validity of unanalyzed criteria of reality taken as valid by common sense. The verification of illusions, hallucinations, and delusions is finally based on the dictum of common sense. The work of science may after all be nothing but an illusion, an hallucination, or a delusion of consciousness. What keeps up the scientist in his work is his firm belief that mankind believe in it, and that when other people are put under the same conditions they will verify his experiences.

Science assumes the postulates on which all experience of common sense is based. Science furnishes our knowledge of the external world, but science is essentially not self-conscious, and it cannot therefore on its own grounds answer the question as to the validity of its knowledge. Is there something independent in that externally perceived object, the house, for instance, or is the

psychic account all there is to it? This is a problem not to be answered on psychological grounds. Knowledge, its possibility, its nature, and its *general* aspect must be taken for granted. Psychological knowledge, general for all subjects must be assumed, as well as general knowledge of the objective world. The psychologist, like other scientists, must assume that his experiences are so conditioned, that though they may be unique, still if others were to be put under the same conditions and confronted with the same external realities, they would pass through similar experiences. In short, psychology assumes the validity of its knowledge, its general validity for all knowing subjects, also knowledge of an externally existing object, analyzed from the subjective standpoint into its psychological elements. Psychology, therefore, has really far more assumptions at its basis than any other natural science, for in addition to the assumption of the existence of an external world it must assume a knowing or sensitive subject, and also the interrelation of the two.

It is true that the so-called "Voluntaristic school" claims that psychology is the only science that has no assumption at its basis. The representative of that school claims that there is but one "unitary experience." From this "unitary experience natural science abstracts the knowing subject and as such deals with abstract mediate experiences requiring auxiliary assumptions, not so is psychology which deals with experience as it is immediately presented to the experiencing subject." According to the voluntarist natural science deals with mediate experience, while psychology deals with immediate experience requiring no assumptions.

This argument is questionable on the very face of it. For the existence of that "unitary experience" is itself an assumption which implies that the experience and the object given by the experience are one. Such a unification of experience and external

object implied in "unitary experience" is a metaphysical assumption which idealistic philosophy may prove as being true, but which the psychologist can not possibly accept as given directly by experience itself. Furthermore, the concept "experience" cannot stand by itself, it implies assumptions; an experience must be of something that lies outside that experience. I have an experience of a house yonder, but the house yonder is not an experience unless regarded from a metaphysical or epistemological standpoint, but then we overstep the boundaries of psychology which deals with experiences of individual organisms and enter the field of philosophy that deals with experience in general.

In taking the most simple psychological element, namely sensation, we have its correlative in the external stimulus; there can be no sensations without a stimulus, but that stimulus is no longer a sensation nor is it any other psychic process, such for instance as an idea. Psychologically considered the identification of the stimulus with psychic state or process is incorrect, because it would mean that all sensory processes are initiated only by sensations or ideas.

Again, if we come to ask in what sense we understand the concept "immediate experience," we find further difficulties. For if the consciousness be of the anoetic type, to borrow the term from Stout, there is neither mediate, nor immediate experience; if the consciousness is of the noetic type it is questionable as to what we mean by "immediate." For it may be contended with the modern realist that the knowledge of the object as given in sensation is immediate, while the knowledge of sensation itself with which psychology deals is not immediately given; it requires a long training before this is separated and sifted from experience; the psychological aspect of experience is really secondary, and as such mediate.

If by "immediate" we mean to indicate the fact that the psychic process must antedate the knowledge of the external objective world, the proposition can be contested once more; for along with the psychic process the object also is given; especially is this true of the idealistic metaphysical presupposition of the voluntaristic school that identifies the objective world with the given primary experience. The objective and subjective aspects of the "unitary experience" are both supposed to be given together and, as such, are both immediate. Natural science abstracts the subjective aspect and psychology abstracts the objective aspect the "mediate experience." We should, however, question the term "mediate experience." What may "mediate experience" mean? If experience has any meaning, it means something gone or lived through directly, immediately; but then all experience is immediate, otherwise it cannot be experience. A mediate experience as contrasted with immediate experience can only mean experience inferred, experience not experienced, a concept contradictory in its very nature and definition, and must be therefore rejected as a meaningless term. The fact is, that "mediate experience" is an inappropriate and misleading term for physical processes which as such are neither experience nor mediate.

The very statement of the voluntaristic psychologist discloses the hidden assumption. There is a unitary experience which falls asunder into mediate experience of natural science and immediate experience, the subject matter of the psychologist. If this be so, then the psychologist does not deal with the totality of experience. Since the mediate experience—part of the "unitary experience" falls outside its domain, it deals only with experience in so far as it is regarded as immediate. Evidently psychology requires presuppositions to supplement the abstracted mediate aspect of the unitary experience. For the voluntaristic school will surely admit that unitary experience is given neither in the mediate aspect nor in the immediate aspect alone, and as science deals either with the

one, or with the other, presuppositions are *ipso facto* also indispensable in psychology.

Moreover, psychology even from the standpoint of the voluntaristic school requires more presuppositions than the natural sciences. For experience, even if it be immediate, must still be of something other than itself. The sensation white is of *something* white, the touch sensation hard is of *something* hard, the pain sensation prick is of *something* sharp, and so on. Now if this something, if that other of which there is immediate experience be the so-called "mediate experience" as this is the supplementary part of the unitary experience, of the total reality, then "immediate experience" is experience of "mediate experience." The science then that deals with immediate experience must postulate mediate experience as one of its fundamental presuppositions. Thus we come once more to the conclusion, and this time from quite a different standpoint, that psychology as science in general has its presuppositions, and that it furthermore presupposes all the presuppositions of the natural sciences.

Psychology explains the subject and object in consciousness, and that only in relation to the question of "how,"—how we come to know this or that object, but whether there *is* an object or subject independent of the experiencing thought *what* the nature of that object or subject is, whether of mental experience stuff or of some extra-mental material, is a question that does not belong to the domain of psychology. The answer is differently given by the idealist, materialist, realist, monist. In short, the problem of "what" belongs not to psychology, but to the province of metaphysics. The Voluntaristic school in denying all presuppositions in psychology starts with a purely metaphysical speculation of the idealistic stamp, namely, in postulating that the external object of psychic experience is identical with that same experience. Psychology or any other science must reject

unhesitatingly such metaphysical speculations.

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