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TRANSLATION

What is Psychology?*

Georges Canguilhem

The psychologist seems to be more embarrassed by the question “What is psychology?” than the philosopher by the question “What is philosophy?” The reason is that philosophy is constituted by the question of its sense and essence much more than it is defined by any answer to it. The fact that this question is reborn incessantly without ever admitting a satisfying response is, for those who would like to call themselves “philosophers,” a reason for humility and not a cause for humiliation. But, for psychology, the question of its essence, or more modestly of its concept, also brings into question the very existence of the psychologist since, lacking the ability to explain what he is, he has difficulty explaining what

* Georges Canguilhem’s “Qu’est-ce que la psychologie?” was first delivered at the *Collège Philosophique* on December 18, 1956. It was then published in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* in 1958. Eight years later, in 1966, it appeared in the second volume of the *Cahiers pour l’Analyse*, which bore its title. This volume included a “Foreword” by Jean-Claude Milner, a “Supplement” (“Les graphes de Jacques Lacan, commentés par Jacques-Alain Miller”), and contributions by Robert Pagès, Alain Grosrichard, Chevalier de Merian, Serge Leclaire, and Thomas Herbert. Translation source: Georges Canguilhem, “Qu’est-ce que la psychologie?” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January-March, 1958), 12-25. Translator’s note: Translation work is labor-intensive and tiring, on a good day. Here, I have tried to stay as close as possible to the letter of Canguilhem’s text. For example, unlike other translations (in both English and Spanish), this one reproduces all the section- and paragraph-breaks of the original 1958 article. And while works mentioned in the body of the essay are presented here under the title of their English translations (when available), all references have been preserved in their original French (mainly to protect the accuracy of page references). In spite of my largely literalist approach to translation, however, there were moments I was forced to abandon this path. For the sake of readability, for instance, I made some stylistic calls. I changed a few commas to semi-colons and, once or twice, introduced a period. I added quotation marks in places where the *mention/use* distinction was helpful and appropriate. I relied on dashes and parentheses to break up some the longer and more cumbersome sentences in the original text. I also translated idiomatic expressions in French into idiomatic expressions in English given that a strict attachment to the literal meaning would have resulted in a bizarre, and bizarrely fractured, style entirely foreign to Canguilhem himself. Finally, where translation proved particularly onerous, I opted for presenting the original French alongside the English translation in bracketed form. Special thanks to Rabih Hage, Simon Truwant, and Ellie Anderson for aiding and abetting in this translation.

he does. He can justify his importance as a specialist only by pointing to an always-debatable “efficiency” [*efficacité*]. And some would not care one bit if this “efficiency” engendered, in the philosopher, an inferiority complex.

In saying of the psychologist’s efficiency that it is debatable, we do not mean that it is illusory; we simply want to note that it will remain, without doubt, ill-founded as long as it has not been shown to be really due to the application of a science, which is to say, as long as the *status* of psychology is not fixed in such a way that one would be forced to take it for something more and better than a composite empiricism that has been codified, literally, for the sake of teaching. In fact, from a good number of works in psychology one gets the impression that they add up to a philosophy without rigor, an ethics without exigency, and a medicine without control. Philosophy without rigor because it is eclectic under the pretense of objectivity; ethics without exigency because it teams up with ethological experiences that are themselves without critique, e.g. those of the confessor, of the educator, of the leader, of the judge, etc.; and medicine without control because of the three kinds of illnesses most unintelligible and least curable—i.e., illnesses of the skin, illness of the nerves, and mental illnesses—the study and treatment of the last two have always furnished to psychology its observations and hypotheses.

Therefore, it seems that in asking “What is psychology?” one poses a question that is neither impertinent nor futile.

For a long time we have looked for the unity characteristic of the concept of a science in the direction of its object. The object would dictate the method used for the study of its properties. But this was, at bottom, to limit science to the investigation of a fact [*un donné*], to the exploration of a domain. When it became clear that every science more or less gives itself its fact and appropriates for itself, in this way, what one calls its “domain,” the concept of a science became progressively more focused on its method than on its object. Or more exactly, the expression “object of science” acquired a new sense. The object of science is no longer only the specific domain of problems and obstacles to resolve, it is also the intention and target of the subject of science, it is the specific project that constitutes a theoretical conscience *as such*.

One could respond to the question “What is psychology?” by making appear the unity of its domain in spite of the multiplicity of methodological projects. To this type of response belongs that brilliantly given by Professor Daniel Lagache, in 1947, to a question posed, in 1936, by Édouard Claparède.¹ The unity of psychology is here sought in its possible definition as general theory of behavior—a synthesis of experimental psychology, clinical psychology, psychoanalysis, social psychology, and ethnology.

¹ Édouard Claparède, *L’unité de la psychologie* (Paris: PUF, 1949).

On a closer look, however, we notice that perhaps this unity looks like a pact of peaceful coexistence signed by professionals more than a logical essence obtained by the revelation of constancy across a variety of cases. Of the two tendencies between which Professor Lagache wants to find a solid accord—i.e. the naturalist one (experimental psychology) and the humanist (clinical psychology)—, one gets the impression that the second carries, for him, more weight. Without a doubt, this is what explains the absence of animal psychology from this review of disputing parties. True, we see very clearly that it is contained by experimental psychology—which is in large part a psychology of animals—, but it is contained there only as material to which the method is applied. In reality, a psychology can be considered “experimental” only on account of its method, and not on account of its object. Meanwhile, and despite appearances, it is on account of its object more than its method that a psychology is said to be “clinical,” “psychoanalytic,” “social,” “ethnological.” All these adjectives are indicative of one and the same object of study: man, *loquacious* or *taciturn*, sociable or unsociable. In light of this, can one rigorously speak about a *general* theory of behavior as long as the question of whether there is continuity or rupture between human language and animal language, between human and animal society, remains unsolved? It is certainly possible that, on this point, it may not be philosophy that gets to decide, but science, in fact many sciences, psychology included. But in order to define itself, psychology cannot prejudge what it is called upon to judge. Otherwise, it is inevitable that in presenting itself as the general theory of behavior, psychology will incorporate some idea of Man. Hence, it is necessary that we allow philosophy to question psychology about where this idea comes from, and whether it may not be, ultimately, from some philosophy.

Because we are not psychologists, we would like to broach the fundamental question posed here via a different route. That is to say, we propose to explore whether or not the unity of a project can confer to the different types of disciplines called “psychological” their eventual unity. But our method of investigation demands a step back [*un recul*]. Exploring how various domains overlap can be done by their separate investigation and by comparing them with one another in the present (about a decade in the case of Professor Lagache). Exploring whether certain projects coincide demands that we extract the sense of each of them, not at the moment it gets lost in the automatism of application but at the moment it emerges from the situation that provokes it. Searching for an answer to the question “What is psychology?” becomes, for us, the obligation of sketching a history of psychology, one considered of course solely in relation to its orientations and in connection with the history of philosophy and the history of the sciences; a history necessarily teleological since it is destined to convey to the posed question the assumed original sense of the diverse disciplines, methods, or enterprises whose current disparity legitimizes this same question.

Psychology as natural science

Although etymologically “psychology” means science of the soul, it is remarkable that an independent psychology is missing, in both idea and fact, from the philosophical systems of antiquity, where the *psyche*, or soul, is taken to be a natural being. There, investigations of the soul find themselves split between metaphysics, logic, and physics. The Aristotelian treatise *On the Soul* is in reality a treatise of general biology, one of his writings consecrated to physics. After Aristotle, and according to the tradition of the School, the “Courses of Philosophy” at the beginning of the 17th century still discuss the soul in the chapter on physics.² The object of physics is the natural and organized body that has life as a potentiality [*ayant la vie en puissance*]. Thus, physics treats the soul as the form of the living body and not as a substance separate from matter. From this point of view, a study of the organs of knowledge—that is to say, of the external senses (the five usual senses) and the internal senses (common sense, fantasy, memory)—does not differ in any regard from a study of the organs of respiration or digestion. The soul is a natural object of study, a form in the hierarchy of forms, even if its essential function is the knowledge of forms. The science of the soul is a province of physiology, in its original and universal sense as a theory of nature.

It is to this ancient conception that an aspect of modern psychology returns without interruption: *psycho-physiology* (for a long time exclusively considered as psycho-neurology but today, also, as psycho-endocrinology) and *psycho-pathology* (as medical discipline). In this respect, it does not seem superfluous to recall that well before the two revolutions that permitted the development of modern physiology, those of Harvey and Lavoisier, a revolution no less important than those produced by the theory of circulation and respiration was set in motion by Galen when he established, clinically and experimentally—after the doctors of the School of Alexandria (Herophilus and Erasistratus), against Aristotelian doctrine, and in accordance with the anticipations of Alcmaeon, Hippocrates, and Plato—that it is the brain and not the heart that is the organ of sensation and movement, and the seat of the soul. Galen truly founds an uninterrupted filiation of research, an empirical pneumatology for centuries, in which the fundamental piece is the theory of animal spirits, and which was dethroned and superseded at the end of the 18th century by electro-neurology. While decidedly pluralist in his conception of the relationship between the psychic functions and the encephalic organs, Gall proceeds directly from Galen and dominates, in spite of his extravagances, all investigations of cerebral localizations during the first sixty years of the 19th century, until Broca.

In sum, the psychology of today, as psycho-physiology and psycho-pathology, always returns to the 2nd century.

² Cf. Scipion De Pleix, *Corps de Philosophie contenant la Logique, la Physique, la Métaphysique et l’Ethique* (Genève, 1636 [1st ed., Paris, 1607]).

Psychology as the Science of Subjectivity

The decline of Aristotelian physics in the 17th century marks the end of psychology as parapsychics, as science of a natural object, and correlatively the birth of psychology as science of subjectivity.

Those truly responsible for the advent of modern psychology as the science of the thinking subject are the mechanical physicists of the 17th century.³

If the reality of the world is not confused with the content of perception, if reality is obtained and posed vis-à-vis the reduction of illusions of sensible experience, then the qualitative residue of this experience engages, in virtue of being possible as falsification of the real, the responsibility of spirit, which is to say, of the subject of experience insofar as it does not identify itself with mathematical or mechanical reason, instrument of truth and measure of reality.

But this responsibility is, to the eyes of the physicist, culpability. Psychology constitutes itself as the enterprise for the exoneration of spirit. Its project is that of a science that, in the face of physics, explains why spirit is forced by nature, first and foremost, to trick reason with respect to reality. Psychology becomes a physics of external sense in order to account for the counter-senses that mechanical physics imputes to the use of the senses in the function of knowledge.

The Physics of External Sense

Psychology, the science of subjectivity, begins as psychophysics for two reasons. First, because it cannot be less than a physics if it is to be taken seriously by physicists. Second, because it must look in a certain nature—i.e., in the structure of the human body—for the reason for the existence of the unreal residues [*résidus irréels*] of human experience.

But even so, this is not a return to the ancient conception of a science of the soul, a branch of physics. The new physics is a calculus. Psychology tends to imitate it. It will seek to determine the quantitative constants of sensation and the relations between these constants.

Here, Descartes and Malebranche are the leaders. In *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (XII), Descartes proposes the reduction of qualitative differences between sense data to a difference between geometric figures. Here, it is a matter of sense data insofar as they are, in the proper sense of the term, information from one body to others. And what is informed by the external senses is an internal sense: “fantasy, which is nothing more than a real and figured body.” In *Rule XIV*, Descartes expressly deals with what Kant will call the intensive magnitude of sensations (*Critique of Pure Reason*, transcendental analytic, anticipation of perception): the comparisons between lights, sounds, etc., which cannot be converted into

³ Cf. Aron Gurwitsch, *Développement historique de la Gestalt-Ösychologie*, in *Thalès*, 2nd year (1935), 167-175.

exact reports except by analogy with the extension of the figured body. If we add that Descartes, even if not properly speaking the inventor of the term and concept of the reflex, has nonetheless affirmed the constancy of the link between excitation and reaction, we see that psychology—understood as the mathematical physics of external sense—begins with him and culminates with Fechner, thanks to the help of physiologists such as Hermann Helmholtz, and in spite of and against the Kantian reserves criticized, in turn, by Herbart.

This type of psychology is enlarged to the dimensions of an experimental psychology by Wundt, whose is motivated by the hope of making appear, in the laws of the “facts of consciousness,” the same kind of analytical determinism that mechanics and physics expect from any universally valid science.

Fechner died in 1887, two years before Bergson’s thesis, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889). Wundt died in 1920 having formed a good amount of disciples (some of whom are still alive), and not without having contributed to the first attacks launched by the psychologists of Form against the analytical physics (at once experimental and mathematical) of external sense. This was done in accordance with Ehrenfels’ observations about the qualities of form (*On the Qualities of Form*, 1890), which themselves resemble Bergson’s analysis of totalities perceived as organic forms that dominate their supposed parts (*Time and Free Will*, ch. II).

The science of internal sense

But the science of subjectivity does not reduce to the elaboration of a physics of external sense. It suggests and presents itself as the science of self-consciousness or the science of internal sense. The term psychology dates to the 18th century, having the sense of the science of the “I” (Wolff). The entire history of this psychology can be written as the history of the counter-senses [*des contre-sens*] that the *Meditations* of Descartes initiate without, however, assuming responsibility for doing so.

When Descartes, at the start of *Meditation III*, considers his “interior” to render himself better known and more familiar to himself, the consideration aims at Thinking. The Cartesian interior, consciousness of the *Ego cogito*, is the direct knowledge the soul has of itself *qua* pure understanding. Descartes calls the *Meditations* “metaphysical” because they claim to arrive directly at the nature and essence of the “I think” in the immediate grasping of its existence. Cartesian meditation is not a personal confessional [*une confidence personnelle*]. The reflection that gives self-knowledge the rigor and impersonality of mathematics is not the kind of self-observation that the spiritualists will to trace back to Socrates beginning in the 19th century, so that Mr. Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard can give Napoleon I the assurance that the *Know Thyself*, the *Cogito*, and *Introspection* all give the throne and the altar their impregnable foundation.

The Cartesian interior has nothing in common with the internal sense of the Aristotelians, “who conceive their objects interiorly and inside the head,”⁴ and which Descartes considered, as we have seen, as an aspect of the body (*Rule XIII*). This is why Descartes says that the soul knows itself directly and more easily than the body. We overlook the explicitly polemical intention of this affirmation too often because, according to Aristotelians, the soul does not know itself directly. “Knowledge of the soul is not direct, but only by reflection. This is because the soul is similar to the eye that sees everything but cannot see itself except by reflection as in a mirror [...] and the soul, by parallel, does not see itself and does not know itself except by reflection and recognition of its effects.”⁵ This thesis rouses the indignation of Descartes when Gassendi reclaims it in his objections to *Meditation III*, and to which he responds: “It is not the eye that sees itself, or the mirror, but spirit, which alone knows the mirror, the eye, and itself.”

But this decisive reply does not put an end to this scholastic argument. Maine de Biran uses it once more against Descartes in “On the Decomposition of Thought,” and A. Comte invokes it against the possibility of introspection, that is to say, against the method of self-knowledge that Reid borrows from Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard to turn psychology into the scientific propaedeutic to metaphysics, thus justifying by experimental means the traditional theses of spiritualist substantialism.⁶ Even Cournot, in all his wisdom, does not hold back from also taking up this argument, this time to support the idea that psychological observation concerns the behavior of others more than the “I” of the observer, that psychology resembles wisdom more than science, and that “it is in the nature of psychological facts to be translated into aphorisms rather than theorems.”⁷

One has misunderstood the teachings of Descartes if one constitutes, against him, empirical psychology as the natural history of the “I” —from Locke to Ribot, passing through Condillac, the French Ideologues and the English Utilitarians— or if one constitutes, after him, a rational psychology founded on the intuition of a substantial “I.”

To Kant still belongs the glory of having established that even if Wolff was able to baptize his post-Cartesian newborns (*Psychologia empirica*, 1732; *Psychologia rationalis*, 1734), he was nonetheless unable to successfully found their pretensions to legitimacy. Kant shows, on the one hand, that phenomenal internal sense is just a form of empirical intuition, which he tends to confuse with time. On the other, he shows that the “I” that is the subject of all judgment of apperception is itself a function of the organization of experience, but one of which there can be no science because it is the transcendental condition for all science. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786) challenges the scientific scope of psychology,

⁴ Scipion Du Pleix, *op. cit.*, *Physique*, 439.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁶ *Cours de Philosophie positive*, 1^{re} leçon.

⁷ Cournot, *Essai sur le fondements de nos connaissances* (1851), §§371-376.

whether based on the image of mathematics or physics. No mathematical psychology is possible in the same way that there exists a mathematical physics. Even if one, in virtue of anticipating perception relative to intensive magnitudes, applied the mathematics of the continuous to the modifications of internal sense, one would not thereby obtain anything more than a geometry confined to the study of the properties of the straight line. There is also no experimental psychology in the same way that there is a chemistry that constitutes itself by the use of analysis and synthesis. We cannot experiment on others or ourselves. Plus, internal observation affects its object. Wanting to surprise oneself in self-observation would lead to insanity [*alienation*]. Psychology, then, can only be descriptive. Its true place is in an *Anthropology*, as a propaedeutic to a theory of skill and prudence, crowned by a theory of wisdom.

The science of intimate sense

If we call “classical psychology” what we intent to refute, it must be noted that in psychology there are always classics for someone. The Ideologues, heirs to the sensualists, took as “classical” the Scottish psychology that only advocated, like them, an inductive method so as to better affirm, against them, the substantiality of spirit. And, before being rejected as “classical” by the theoreticians of Gestalt psychology, the atomistic and analytic psychology of the sensualists and the Ideologues was itself already viewed as such by a romantic psychologist like Maine de Biran. Through him, psychology becomes the technique of the Diary and the science of intimate sense. The solitude of Descartes was the asceticism of a mathematician. The solitude of Maine de Biran is the idleness of a school principal. The Cartesian *I think* founds thought itself. The Biranian *I want* founds self-consciousness over and against an exteriority. At his isolated desk, Biran discovers that psychological analysis does not consist in simplifying but in complicating; that the primitive psychic fact is not an element but already a relation, and that this relation is lived with effort. He arrives at two conclusions, unexpected for a man whose functions are of authority, which is to say, commandment: consciousness requires the conflict between a power and a resistance; man is not, as de Bonald thought, an intelligence serviced by the organs but a living organization serviced by intelligence. It is necessary for the soul to be incarnated, and so there can be no psychology without biology. Self-observation does not forgo recourse to either the physiology of voluntary movement or the pathology of affectivity. The situation of Maine de Biran is unique, between the two Royer-Collards. He has dialogued with the doctrinarian and been judged by the psychiatrist. We have from Maine de Biran a “Promenade avec M. Royer-Collard dans les jardins du Luxembourg” and we have from Antoine-Athanase Royer-Collard, the former’s younger brother, an “Examen de la Doctrine de Maine de Biran.”⁸ If

⁸ Published by his son Hyacinthe Royer-Collard (in *Annales Médico-Psychologiques*, Book 2 (1843), 1).

Maine de Biran had not read and discussed Cabanis (*On the Relations between the Physical and Moral Aspects in Man*, 1798), if he had not read and discussed Bichat (*Physiological Researches on Life and Death*, 1800), the history of pathological psychology would ignore him, which it cannot do. The second Royer-Collard is, after Pinel and alongside Esquirol, one of the founders of the French school of psychiatry. Pinel had pleaded for the idea that the insane are at once sick patients like the rest, neither possessed nor criminals, and also different from them and should be cared for separately and separated, depending on the case, into specialized hospital services. Pinel founded mental medicine as an independent discipline, starting from the therapeutic isolation of the insane at Bicêtre and Salpêtrière. Royer-Collard imitates Pinel at the Maison Nationale de Charenton, where he becomes head doctor in 1805, the same year Esquirol defends his medical thesis on *The Passions Considered as Causes, Symptoms and Means of Cure in Cases of Insanity*. Royer-Collard becomes, in 1816, professor of legal medicine at the Faculty of Medicine of Paris and, in 1821, the first holder of the chair of mental medicine. Royer-Collard and Esquirol had as pupils: Calmeil, who studied paralysis in the insane; Bayle, who recognized and isolated general paralysis; Félix Voisin, who created the study of mental retardation in infants. And it is at Salpêtrière that—after Pinel, Esquirol, Lelut, Baillarger, and Falret, among others—Charcot becomes, in 1862, the leader of a service whose works will be followed by Théodule Ribot, Pierre Janet, cardinal Mercier, and Sigmund Freud.

We have seen psycho-pathology positively begin with Galen and culminate in Sigmund Freud, creator of the term “psychoanalysis” in 1896. Psycho-pathology did not develop in isolation from the other psychological disciplines. Because of the investigations of Biran, it compelled philosophy to ask itself, since at least a century before, from which of the two Royer-Collards it should borrow the idea of psychology that we must develop. In this way, psycho-pathology is at once judge and party to that uninterrupted debate in which metaphysics gives direction to psychology without thereby giving up the right to say a word about the relationship between the physical and the psychic. For a long time, this relationship has been formulated as somato-physical before becoming psycho-somatic. This reversal is the same, moreover, as the one carried out on the signification of the unconscious. If one identifies psychism and consciousness—based, rightly or wrongly, on the authority of Descartes—, the unconscious turns out to be of a physical order. If one assumes that the psychic can be unconscious, psychology does not reduce to the science of consciousness. And the psychic is no longer only what is hidden, but also what hides itself, that which one hides; it is not simply *the intimate*, but also—a term Bossuet takes from the mystics—*the abyssal*. Psychology is no longer just the science of intimacy, but the science of the profundities of the soul.

Psychology as science of reactions and of behavior

In proposing to define Man [*l'homme*] as a living organization serviced by intelligence, Maine de Biran marked in advance—better, apparently, than Gall who thought, according to Lelut, that “man is no longer an intelligence but a will serviced by the organs”⁹—the terrain on which a new psychology would be constituted in the 19th century. But, at the same time, he assigned it its limits since, in his *Anthropology*, he situated human life between animal and spiritual life.

The 19th century sees the biology of human behavior emerge (alongside psychology) as a nervous and mental pathology, as the physics of external sense, as the science of internal and intimate sense. The reasons for this emergence seem to be the following. First, scientific reasons to know: the constitution of Biology as a general theory of the relations between organisms and their milieus, which marks the end of belief in the existence of a separate human reign. Then, technical and economic reasons to know: the development of an industrial regime that directs attention to the industrious character of the human species and marks the end of belief in the dignity of speculative thought. And, finally, political reasons that mark the end of belief in values of social privilege and result in the diffusion of egalitarianism: conscription and public education become State affairs, and the demand for equality in military positions and civil functions (to each according to his job, works, or merits) becomes the real, though often overlooked, foundation of a phenomenon proper to modern societies, that is to say, the generalized practice of expertise, in every sense of the word, as the determination of competence and the test for simulation.

At any rate, what characterizes this psychology of behavior, in comparison to other types of psychological investigation, is its constitutional incapacity to grasp and present with clarity its founding project. If among the founding projects of previous types of psychology, there are some that pass for philosophical counter-senses [*des contre-sens philosophiques*], here, to the contrary—all links to philosophical theory having been refused—the issue is to figure out from where a given psychological investigation gets its sense. In accepting to become, under the sponsorship of biology, an objective science of aptitudes, reactions, and behaviors, psychology and psychologists completely forget to situate their own specific behaviors in the context of their historical circumstances and the social milieus in which they propose their methods or techniques, and in which they make their services accepted.

Nietzsche, adumbrating the psychology of the 19th century psychologist, writes: “We, psychologists of the future, view the instrument that wishes to know itself almost as a sign of degeneration; we are the instruments of knowledge and we would like to have all the naïveté and precision of an instrument; so we must not analyze ourselves, know ourselves.”¹⁰

⁹ *Qu'est-ce que la phrénologie? Ou Essai sur la signification et la valeur des systèmes de psychologie en général et de celui de Gall, en particulier*, (Paris, 1836), 401.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *La volonté de puissance*, translated by Bianquis, Book 3, §335.

Astonishing misunderstanding, and how revealing too! The psychologist only wants to be an instrument, without knowing *of what* or *of whom*. Nietzsche seemed more inspired when, at the start of *The Genealogy of Morality*, he applied himself to the enigma represented by English psychologists, that is to say, the utilitarians who were preoccupied with the genesis of moral sentiments. He wondered what had pushed them in the direction of cynicism when explaining human behavior in terms of interest and utility, and in the direction of forgetting these fundamental motivations. It is precisely here that, in the face of the behavior of the psychologists of the 19th century, Nietzsche provisionally renounces all cynicism, which is to say, all lucidity!

The idea of utility, as a principle of psychology, is linked to the philosophical understanding of human nature as a power of artifice [*comme puissance d'artifice*] (Hume, Burke) or, more prosaically, to the definition of Man as a toolmaker (the French *Encyclopédistes*, Adam Smith, Franklin). But the principle of a biological psychology of behavior does not seem to have been disengaged, in the same fashion, from an explicitly philosophical conscience, without a doubt because this principle can be activated only on the condition that it remain unformulated. This principle is the definition of Man himself as tool. Utilitarianism (which implicates the idea of utility for man, the idea of Man as judge of utility) was succeeded by instrumentalism (which implicates the idea of the utility of man, the idea of Man as mean to utility). Intelligence is no longer what organizes the organs and avails itself of them, but what services them. And it is not with impunity that the historical origins of the psychology of reaction must be sought in the works produced by the discovery of “the personal equation” of astronomers using the telescope (Maskelyne, 1796). Man was studied first as the instrument of the scientific instrument, before being studied as the instrument of all instruments.

The investigations of the laws of adaptation and learning, of the detection and measurement of aptitudes, and of the conditions of output and productivity (whether concerning individuals or groups)—investigations that are inseparable from their applications to selection or orientation—admit a common implicit postulate: the nature of Man is to be a tool, and his vocation is to be put in his place, to his task.

Nietzsche, of course, is right to say that the psychologists would like to be the “naïve and precise instruments” of this study of man. They have struggled to reach objective knowledge, even if the determinism they seek in behavior is no longer the sort of Newtonian determinism familiar to the first physicists of the 19th century, but rather a statistical determinism, progressively resting on the findings of biometrics. But what is the sense of this instrumentalism to the second power? What is it that pushes or inclines psychologists to appoint themselves, of all men, the instruments of an ambition to treat Man as an instrument?

In the other types of psychology, the soul or the subject—as natural form or consciousness of interiority—is the principle used to justify the value a certain idea of Man

relative to the truth of things. But for a psychology in which the word “soul” causes flight and the word “consciousness” laughter, the truth of Man is captured by the fact that there is no longer any idea of Man as anything other than a tool. We must recognize that to talk about the idea of a tool, it is necessary that not every idea belong to the rank of a tool; and that in order to assign a value to a tool, it is precisely necessary that not every value be that of a tool whose subordinate value consists in procuring some other thing. Now, if the psychologist cannot derive his psychological project from an idea of man, does he think he can justify this project with his behavior of the utilization of man? We say it well, “his behavior of utilization,” in spite of two possible objections. Someone could say that, in a way, this type of psychology does not ignore the distinction between theory and application and, in another way, that this utilization is not ultimately the doing of the psychologist himself but of the person or persons who ask him for reports and diagnostics. We will respond that, unless one is going to confuse the theoretician of psychology with the professor of psychology, one must recognize that the contemporary psychologist is, more often than not, a practicing professional whose “science” is completely motivated by that search for “laws” of adaptation to a socio-technological environment—not to a natural environment—, for that which confers on his operations of “measure” a signification of evaluation and a range of expertise. In this way the behavior of the psychologist of human behavior involves, almost by necessity, a feeling of superiority, a good dirigist conscience, the mentality of a manager of the relations between man and man. That is why we must go back to the cynical question: who designates psychologists as the instruments of instrumentalism? How do we recognize those men who are worthy of assigning to instrument-man [*l’homme-instrument*] his role and function? Who counsels the counselors?

Needless to say, we do not place ourselves on the terrain of capacities and technique. Whether there are good or bad psychologists—that is to say, technicians skilled due to learning and technicians noxious due to stupidity not forbidden by law—is not the issue. The issue is that a science or a scientific technique do not contain, within themselves, any idea that could confer them their sense. In his *Introduction to Psychology*, Paul Guillaume described the psychology of a man taking a test. The subject [*le testé*] defends himself against this investigation, fearing that an action is being exercised over it. Guillaume sees in this state of mind an acknowledgement of the efficacy of the test. But one could also see here the embryo of the psychology of the tester. The defense of the subject being tested is the repugnance of seeing itself treated like an insect by a man who is not recognized as having the authority to tell him *what he is* or *what he must do*. “To treat like an insect,” the word is from Stendhal, who

takes it from Cuvier.¹¹ What if we treated the psychologist like an insect? What if we applied to the dismal and insipid Kinsey, for example, Stendhal's recommendation?

In other words, in 19th and 20th centuries, the psychology of reaction and behavior thought it made itself independent by separating itself from all philosophy, that is to say, from the kind of speculation that looks for an idea of Man beyond the biological and sociological facts. But this psychology could not prevent the recurrence of its results in the behavior of those who obtain them. And, to the extent that one forbids philosophy from furnishing the answer, the question "What is psychology?" becomes "In doing what they do, what do psychologists hope to accomplish?" "In the name of what are they instituted psychologists?" When Gideon takes command as the head of the Israelites and escorts the Midianites beyond the Jordan (*The Bible: Judges, Book VII*), he uses a test of two degrees that permits him to keep only ten thousand out of thirty-two thousand men, and then three hundred out of ten thousand. But this test owes to the Eternal the finalization of its use and the process of selection used. To select a selector, it is normally necessary to transcend the blueprint of technical selection procedures. In the immanence of scientific psychology, the question remains: Who has, not the competence, but the mission of being a psychologist? Psychology always relies on an doubling up [*dédoublement*], but this is no longer the doubling of consciousness (according to the facts and norms entailed by the idea of man); it is the doubling of a mass of "subjects" and of an elite corporation of specialists who invest themselves with their proper mission.

In Kant and Maine de Biran, psychology situates itself in an *Anthropology*, which is to say—despite the ambiguity, much in vogue today, of this term—in a philosophy. In Kant, the general theory of human ability is still connected to a theory of wisdom [*sagesse*]. Instrumental psychology presents itself as a general theory of ability outside any reference to wisdom. If we cannot define this psychology via an idea of man, that is to say, if we cannot situate psychology within philosophy, we do not have the power to prevent anyone from just considering themselves "psychologists" and calling whatever they do "psychology." But neither can we prevent philosophy from continuing to interrogate the ill-defined status of psychology, ill-defined from the viewpoint of the sciences as much as from that of techniques. In doing this, philosophy carries itself with a constitutive ingenuity that is so different from gullibility that it does not exclude a provisional cynicism. This ingenuity leads philosophy to return, once again, to the common sector, to the side of non-specialists.

It is rather vulgarly, then, that philosophy poses to psychology the question: tell me what you aim for so that I may find out what you are? But a philosopher can also address

¹¹ "Instead of hating the small bookseller of the neighboring town who sells the *Popular Almanac*, I used to say to my friend Mr. de Ranville to apply to him the remedy indicated by Cuvier: treat him like an insect. Find out what are his means of sustenance, try to guess his ways of making love" (Stendhal, *Mémoires d'un Touriste*, Calmann-Lévy (ed.), Book 2, page 23).

himself to the psychologist in the form of offering orientation advice (one time does not a habit make!), and say to him: when one leaves the Sorbonne by the street Saint-Jacques, one can ascend or descend; if one ascends, one approaches the Pantheon, the conservatory of great men; but if one descends, one heads directly to the Police Department.

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