

## THE PLACE OF PURPOSE IN PSYCHOLOGY

At one time-and that too, not very long ago,-a fierce controversy raged over the place of purpose in Psychology. The Behaviorists and the non-Behaviorists fought many a battle on the methodological and definitional fronts to decide the issue. And they were not far wrong in their mode of attack, for the question ultimately hinges on one's point of view in Psychology. How you define Psychology and understand its subject matter is an important factor in the controversy. If you define Psychology as a study of human and animal reactions to physical and social stimuli and if you omit all reference to conscious and sub-conscious processes, and attempt to explain behaviour on strictly deterministic lines, you are sure to ignore purposes; but if like McDougall, you feel that all mental activity is purposive and also that purposive action is fundamentally different from mechanical action, you will have a philosophical base to assert that all animal and human behaviour is purposive in howsoever vague and lowly a degree. In support of their contention the Behaviorists brought forward the theory of conditioned reflexes, while the non-Behaviorists took their stand on Hormic theory which resembles in essentials the will-to-live of Schopenhauer or the *elan vital* of Bergson or the libido of Dr. G. C. Jung.

The controversy stems from a larger issue, which is whether human life can be explained completely and entirely through the employment of concepts and techniques prevalent in physico-chemical sciences or whether there is something in human life which defies mechanical explanations and requires new categories and hypotheses. Watson took the first alternative and so treated man as a machine though more complicated and delicate than others, while McDougall took the second alternative, and treated man as if he were *sui generis*, that is to say possessed certain features which were inexplicable on strictly mechanistic grounds and thus needed mentalistic categories.

As the controversy rose when physical sciences had scored triumph in almost all spheres of human life, it was easy for Behaviourist to bring the

weight of physical sciences in their favour and to accuse McDougall an his adherents of anthropomorphism. McDougall was not afraid of the accusation, rather he accepted it and attempted to substantiate his claim by an array of facts drawn from Biology, Physiology and Psychology. His contention was that if animal and human behaviour exhibited certain types of characteristics which his own observations had shown, then it was impossible to subscribe to a thorough going mechanism as advocated by his opponents. McDougall did not invoke any metaphysical hypothesis in favour of his standpoint, though his adversaries often accused him of that; he was on the contrary doing exactly what the scientists were doing in their own fields. He was collecting facts through observations and experiments, he was classifying and sifting evidence and then interpreting the data so obtained in the light of his own presuppositions. His investigations showed that both animal and human behaviour was goal-seeking because it persisted, it was variable, it terminated when the goal was reached, it improved with repetition, it was spontaneous and it was the total reaction of the organism. McDougall therefore maintained that though some parts of behaviour were explicable in terms of tropisms, simple and compound reflexes and also conditioned responses yet there remained an essential part namely the hormic one which could not be explained without invoking mentalistic categories. When he came to instincts, which in his opinion exhibited the hormic and mnemonic tendencies of life he eshewed the mechanistic hypothesis in favour of a psychical one and described instincts as psycho-physical dispositions which make their possessors to perceive or pay attention to objects of a particular type, to feel emotional experience of a particular type in their presence and to act or at least a tendency to act in a particular manner. According to him, 'Directly or indirectly the instincts are the prime movers of all human activity . . . determine the ends of all activities and supply the driving power . . . and all the complex intellectual apparatus of the most highly developed mind is . . . but the instrument by which these impulses seek their satisfaction'.

In 1908 McDougall listed twelve major human instincts, by 1932 the list went up to eighteen. Most of the instincts were social in character but there

was one which mainly physical, being a group of very simple propensities serv-  
bodily needs, such as coughing, sneezing, breathing, evacuation. But what-  
ever the instinct be, McDougall believed, that there was something central  
in every instinct and that was the emotion part of it which served as its driving  
force in all its varied activities. McDougall asserted that the cognitive and  
the conative parts of an instinct were liable to change and modification but  
not the emotional part of it which remained constant no matter what the  
changes be or how they are affected. He however thought that it was  
through the modification of the instinctive structure which he called the  
primary that the superstructure personality which was the secondary struc-  
ture for him could be reared and nourished. As a matter of fact the entire  
personality from the start to the finish was an expression of the hormic  
tendencies as exemplified in the primary and secondary structures of human-  
life.

This hypothesis was presented first of all by McDougall in his famous  
book, *An Introduction to Social Psychology*. The hypothesis was so neat and so  
simple that it caused a stir among the social scientists. They were captivated  
by its beauty and simplicity, for all that it needed was to start from the instinc-  
tive basis of life and then to trace its developments through sublimation to  
the formation of sentiments and master-sentiments, finally to the integration  
of the whole personality under the sentiment of self-regard. And this was  
indeed very simple. But the very social scientists who were at first enthralled  
by it became critical. They saw how McDougall and his followers differed  
in the numbers and the nature of instincts. They also felt that the instinct  
theory was simply a revival of the old discredited faculty psychology of the  
seventeenth century. What McDougall had done was to give it a new garb  
manufactured from the Darwinian and semi-metaphysical ideas current  
during his time. Moreover the instinct theory failed to notice and appreciate  
the enormous part which socialization played in the growth and development  
of human personality. The child does not grow in a vacuum, but lives  
and has his being, right from the start, in an atmosphere which is the product  
of social action and reaction. A great many instincts of McDougall could  
be explained in terms of socializing processes and therefore it was not

needed that all the so-called instincts of McDougall be accepted. Why not start from a few organic tendencies and explain all later accretions as accumulations from the processes of socialization, direct or indirect?

The Hormic theory thus stood condemned. But Watsonian behaviourism did not fare better. It set out with the ambition of rescuing Psychology from anthropomorphic notions and refashioning it on the model of physico-chemical sciences. With this object in view, Watson ushered in a program of scientific methodology for the description and interpretation of behaviour. He maintained that both animal and human behaviour was amenable to scientific categories. The principle of causal determination reigned supreme, he held, both in the physical and non-physical realm. As a matter of fact, Watson did not recognize any material difference between the methodology of physical and the so-called psychological sciences. Facts are facts and if they are objective as they should be, they can be dealt with in only one way. In so doing the behaviourists acted as precursors to the Logical Positivists who in their doctrine of the Unity of Sciences attempted to level up all sciences, no matter what their aims and objectives be. As I have shown elsewhere, the doctrine of the unity of sciences has failed because of its rigorism and universalism. It is not at all desirable to regiment all science and to dress them in a uniform of the same size irrespective of their height, depth and contours. Watson believed that in order to study behaviour objectively, there should be no reference to consciousness. Behaviour should be studied in terms of stimuli and responses. The stimuli corresponded to causes, while responses corresponded to effects. As in physical sciences, one goes forward from causes to effects or comes back from effects to cause, so in psychology one should go forward from causes to effects and return from effects to cause. But very soon it was realized that a program of this nature was unsuited to the description of human behaviour. The reason being that a living organism has characteristics which are substantially different from the inorganic ones. One can safely ignore all reference to the internal structure of a stone while calculating its reactions, for all that is needed is its mass, and then its acceleration, resistance, velocity etc. But

in the case of animals and human beings, such an account fails. In their case reference to internal structure, of the organism its composition and behaviour is absolutely essential.

In this connection I would like to refer to a distinction which Aristotle has made between a movement and an activity. The latter is something which contains its end in itself, which is carried out for its own sake, while the former is for the sake of something else. No movement is therefore in itself and by itself intelligible, for it is always possible to ask why it was made. Suppose somebody is making rapid movements with his body and is hurrying onward. We can ask why he is making movements of this sort. It may be said that he is making these movements in order to reach the railway station or to win the race or just to give exercise to his body. The movements of the muscles or other organs of the body which accompany inevitably the performance of any activity just *occur*, and taken account of by a physiologist; the activity on the other hand does not occur, it is *made* to occur. The activity of going to the railway station, winning the race or taking exercise does not just occur, it is made to occur, to put it in the old Aristotelean terminology, an activity has a final cause, while a movement has an efficient cause. (The terminology is not a happy one but it does emphasise an important distinction which is very often ignored by Behaviorists).

What Aristotle really meant was that an activity could be understood by itself, while a movement could not be. A movement could not occur unless there was already a possibility of it before it actually occurred. Continual occurrence of such movements may lead to an activity but it is never enough to explain an activity in terms of these movements alone. If we ignore these distinctions and treat movement and activity at par, we are guilty of a category confusion. For movement and activity are terms belonging to two different strata or two different layers of language. With movements we are concerned with physical phenomena, the laws concerning which are in principle derivable from the laws of physics, while activity is 'interpretative'. Moreover in performing the same kind of activity I may not be repeating the same movements. In going to the railway station to catch a train I have to use my

legs but my movements may not be the replica of the past. While on the previous occasion my running may be shaky or irregular, it may be slow and balanced now. Hence no fixed criteria can be laid down as to what kind of movements will constitute 'catching a train, or winning a race or taking an exercise', though there are rough and ready methods of doing so. We have learnt through experience what type of movements are ordinarily and generally performed in catching a train, or winning a race or taking an exercise. That is why an activity is interpretative, while a movement is not.

In physiology we deal with the mechanism of movements, though the mechanism can not be understood in the classical sense. The seventeenth century view of the machine shall have to be revised if we have to explain the movements of animal and men in terms of machine. Human movements are not all reflex-like, and there is some justice in the claim that the simple reflex is in any case an abstraction. But even if we grant that it is in principle possible to give an account of some mechanism, this mechanism will give an account of movements only, and not of behaviour per se, however, much we may feel that behaviour will have been accounted for incidentally in providing a mechanism for the movements which constitute behaviour on a particular occasion. The reason in Aristotelean language is that a behaviour has a final cause, while a movement has an efficient cause only. It would therefore follow that causes of behaviour cannot be given as causes of movements.

Viewed in this light, the theory of Behaviourism seems to be an utter failure. Watson and his followers were impressed by conditioned reflex and sought to analyse all human activities in their terms. But this was a big mistake, for reflex movements are not by themselves the sort of movements which could constitute behaviour on a particular occasion; reflex movements occur and are not made by the subject, they are not self-adjusting or purposive, in the sense that we ask the subject why he made the movement. Consequently when ever an attempt is made by the Watsonians to identify behaviour with movements they have exposed themselves to category mistakes, and have given a distorted view of human life and its workings. The

movements which constitute the basis of an activity may be explicable in terms of a machine—howsoever subtle or complicated it may be—but not that of the activity itself which is interpretative and purposive in the sense defined above.

The great service which Behaviorism rendered to human thought lay in the fact that it denied Cartesian dualism but it overshot its mark when it maintained that behaviour is machanical. It is one thing to say that we need not assume a pure ego as a centre of activity and quite another to say that behaviour is nothing but a series of simple or compound reflexes. To say that behaviour is altogether mechanical amounts to denying something which is quite obvious that there is a sense in which we may be said to have a mental life. Hence the Gestalt psychologists and those like Dilthey and others who have espoused an 'understanding psychology' as a cultural science are justified in their protests against it. Behaviourism is a bogey. By making a false identification of behaviour with movements it has suggested that human and animal behaviour may be machanical. It has also suggested a wrong model, for it is not in terms of the seventeenth century conception of a machine that movements can be understood. To crown all the psychologists are not concerned with the exhibition of a form of behaviour in a certain series of movements; nor do they confine themselves with this, but deal with behaviour in general. The ultimate end of Psychology is to understand human beings and organisms, not just the movements of their limbs, however much these may, sometimes, constitute behaviour.

From the above it would be clear that both hormic Psychology and Behaviourism failed to give a correct picture of human life, for both went to excesses and exaggerated their claims. It seems to me that human life is both purposive and non-purposive. It all depends upon the view point or the vantage-point one adopts. Looked from below life looks mechanical, but looked from above, it seems to be charged through and through with teleological considerations. The Behaviorist looks at the activities of human life from the point of view of physiology, stimulus response mechanism, tropisms and conditioned reflexes and finds nothing but an interplay of

blind causal forces working at the primal level. The Purposivist, on the contrary takes shelter behind some metaphysical dogma and finds, right from the beginning, the operation of teleological forces sometimes conscious sometimes unconscious. To me both these claims look one-sided. I therefore move on the the latest trend in Psychology, to wit, existential psychology, which provides a *via media* and also transcends the conflict posed by modern psychology on this issue.

Existential psychology is based on the pre-supposition that all human success and failure has two aspects; a causal, determinate aspect and one that is purposive and value-conscious. For instance, neurosis which is a common disease of today, may be partially explained through constitutional dispositions, repressed and unsublimated urges, a social compensation of the inferiority feeling and an inadequate integration of the shadow. But for fuller explanation we shall have to enquire into its existential value or lack of value. Every symptom has a definite cause, yet at the same time it is bound up with destiny, and in the last analysis constitutes a choice made in a situation of conflict.

According to Rollo May, Existentialism is the endeavour to understand man by cutting below the cleavage between subject and object which has bedevilled Western thought and science shortly after the Renaissance. So far as Western thought is concerned the dichotomy of subject and object was created by Descartes. He understood human life as an abode of two contradictory things—body and mind—and sought to explain their relationships through all sort of ingenious hypotheses. All psychologists of the post-Renaissance period were influenced and inspired by Cartesian dualism and attempted to explain it through epi-phenomenalism, parallelism and interactionism. To me, the whole controversy looks senseless. It arose because of a semantical confusion. It was supposed, that as the word 'and' comes in between body and mind, the two, that is to say, body and mind, must belong to two different categories. Consequently in order to do away with this misconception, in books of modern psychology the word 'and' is replaced by a hyphen. Body and mind is now read as body-mind, and the controversy



relating to their relationships is dropped. But the mischief still remains. Instead of body and mind the problem now faced by the psychologists and philosophers is that of subject and object—a slightly different one but only slightly and by no means radically or sharply different. In the Arabic language, I am told, no such distinction exist. Consequently, all the weird and intricate discussions which centre round the subject-object distinctions and their inter-relationships would have no relevance for muslim thinking. But since Muslim Philosophy was inspired in its early days by the Greek thought, hence whatever line of thinking the Greek argument assumed became also the line for Muslim thinking.

To remove the dichotomy of the world into subject and object, we shall have to refer to Heidegger whose theory of being-in-the-world and transcendence has made a significant contribution to the problem. Heidegger's theory is not metaphysical in the traditionally accepted sense of the word 'metaphysical', but has an empirical foundation. For there are two types of empirical scientific knowledge. One is the discursive inductive knowledge in the sense of describing, explaining, and controlling natural events, whereas the second is the phenomenological empirical knowledge in the sense of a methodical, critical exploitation or interpretation of phenomenal contents. Heidegger's theory is empirical in the second sense. The word for transcendence in the German language means 'climbing over or above, mounting'. Transcendence is directed toward the 'world', and what is transcended is the being itself and especially that in the form of which a human existence itself 'exists'. In his concept of being-in-the-world as transcendence Heidegger has not only returned to a point prior to the subject-object dichotomy of knowledge and eliminated the gap between self and the world, but has also elucidated the structure of subjectivity as transcendence. In existential Psychology, 'word' always means that towards which the existence has climbed and according to which it has designed itself, or in other words the manner and mode in which that which is, becomes accessible to human existence. The term 'word' therefore, does not signify any pre-design of the world, it signifies rather the attitude towards the world.

The last point takes us to the center of Existential Psychology which is that a man is a meaning-pursuing and meaning-achieving animal. In the older type of Psychology, current at the moment in the Anglo-American world, to wit the Behaviouristic, Experimental type this character of human life would be stated as goal-seeking and goal-pursuing. Experiments would then be done to measure this tendency in the precise language of mathematics. All sorts of rats and cats be requisitioned and put in puzzle boxes and cages with experimenters sitting around them in order to study what on the surface looks trivial and pointless. For what is being studied by experimenters under the highly sophisticated conditions of artificially manufactured laboratories not only distorts the data but also touches the fringe of what essentially and fundamentally constitutes the very being of a living organism. Experiments on sensations, learning, memory, intelligence, even personality touch the outer most exterior of human organism and have no access to the problems of existence which according to Heidegger and his followers provide a genuine field for psychological research and exploitation. How a person senses, remembers, imagines, feels or reasons are important aspects of human life no doubt but they do not in any way constitute one's being. Consequently, a psychology which is concerned just with these and with no other aspect whatsoever would have no relevance to the life as it is actually lived by real men and women. I therefore feel that the term 'meaning' as understood by the existential psychologists cannot be equated with the 'goal' of the behavioristic-oriented psychology of the Anglo-American world.

There was a time when "the subject of psychology, the study of man, was subordinate to the total world view, that is, to a hierarchy in which God, and world all it contains, and man with his own characteristic feelings, and thoughts, had not yet been wrenched apart but formed a coherent whole." As a matter of fact, man as the subject of psychology was unimaginable outside a stable system of relationships and values. Gradually, however, the process of fragmentation began and man as a result of the fissiparous tendencies generated by economic, social, religious and political order of the so-called civilised societies lost his moorings and became isolated and lonely. He

was no longer sheltered within the hierarchy of values. Due to his Humanistic trends he thought that he could construct a system of values for himself. God was 'dead.' His place was taken by the total man. But in studying him the mathematically oriented psychology either saw man as a repetition of one and the same model or it saw the whole world as being full of 'exceptional cases' instead of living men and women.

Moreover the 'rat and cat' psychology of the Behaviorists and experimentalists accepted determinism as a guiding principle of their research and methodology. Even Freud who delved deep into the unconscious to discover motives and goals of human activities could not but accept the model of physico-chemical sciences. In all his explanations of intentional and unintentional motivation, he was inspired by the principle of determinism. He was not prepared to believe that there could be an event away from the chain of universal occurrence. For 'if a single link in the chain of natural determinism is broken, the whole scientific outlook fall to the ground', says Freud. He rejected the idea of dreams being the product of a loose and scattered brain on the ground that the idea if accepted would amount to the suspension of the law of determinism in the field of abnormal psychology. Likewise his belief that all mental activities had their causes in the unconscious region was motivated by his desire to bring psychology in line with physical sciences where he supposed that the law of causation operated without any break. The 'Depth' psychology of Jung fares no better. He seems to go beyond the confines of natural sciences, for he believes in a divine archetype. But let it not be forgotten that Jung's archetypes are myths, that is symbolic representations of the collective unconscious mirrored in the individual psyche-an accumulation of value in the unconscious. Depth psychology has no doubt evolved 'teleological' or 'finalistic' explanations, but in actual fact these are just as deterministic as the causal ones. Instead of a concatenation backwards, it is directed forward and the chain of causation being of course maintained.

Accordingly neither the 'rat and cat' psychology of the Behavioristic type nor the Unconscious psychologies of Freudian and Jungian types can do full justice to the problem of meaning in human life. For where determi-

ism reigns supreme, there the question of meaningful existence cannot arise. The pursuit of objectivity, which is the hallmark of scientific enquiry cannot but introduce distortion in the field of psychology. It leads a psychologist to ignore existence which is creativity and freedom. Sartre's assertion that 'man is condemned to be free' can have no meaning in deterministic psychologies. While there is a good deal of talk about drives, goals and purposes in books of psychologies there is, as a matter of fact no recognition of the fundamental nature of human existence.

The Existential psychologists have rejected the idea of human nature as such. They do not believe in any pull backward forward. They repudiate the theory of determinism so far as human life is concerned. But in so doing they do not deny heredity or environmental pressures. The facts of biology and geography are there and have to be accepted. But they still think that these factors can be transcended or exploited in the interest of authentic existence. In their transcendence lies the secret of meaningful creative existence.

On the face of it existential psychology would accomodate both Behaviorism and Hormic psychology. In so far as it rejects the notion of pre-design it harmonises with what I have termed the 'rat and cat' psychology, but in so far as it advocates subjectivity and creativity and admits the creation of values through the free exercise of choices, it accords partial recognition of the claims of Hormic Psychology. But this harmonisation and accommodation is simply superficial. As a matter of fact Existential Psychology transcends both of them in so far as it does away with the dichotomy of subject and object and adopts synthetic approach instead of the analytic one. In so doing it throws a new light on the place of purpose in psychology.

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