

THREE EVILS OF PRESENT-DAY PSYCHOLOGY¹

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I count modern psychology as among the great and beneficent influences of our time. Such a psychological clinic as we have associated with this church, for example, is an anticipation and prophecy of the new kind of religious confessional which will be associated with all churches in the years that are ahead.²

But good things are not wholly good. Even the best things bring along with them attendant evils. Let me name some.

PHYSICAL REDUCTIONISM

As lately as when I went to college, psychology was almost exclusively a subjective science. "Psychology," said William James, "is the description and explanation of states of consciousness as such." But "states of consciousness" are an inward experience, and such experience can be reached only by a process of introspection.

Now the change which has taken place in recent years [since about 1913] is from the subjective to the objective method. Present-day psychology is concerned not so much with consciousness as with activity, behavior, which can be observed without, and therefore tested and verified. The psychologist proceeds to-day just like any other scientific investigator. He treats a phenomenon of the mind as a chemist treats a combination of chemical elements, or a physicist a resultant of natural forces, or a biologist the reaction of a cellular organism. It is this transition from the personal to the impersonal, from the subjective to the objective point of view which has snatched psychology from the domination of "a kind of subtle religious philosophy," and made it for the first time a genuine science.

Now it is the same transition which has brought about the first of the evils of present-day psychology. With the elimination of consciousness has come, apparently, an elimination of thought, of

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²Some two months earlier Dr. Holmes had announced that the Community Church was taking over the Advisory Council of Individual Psychology, directed by Alfred Adler, from the Vanderbilt Clinic. The Advisory Council, as Adler's clinic was called, started functioning at the Community Church in October of that year, with Dr. W. Beran Wolfe conducting the sessions.

reason, of purpose, of will, of individuality, of everything which comprises what we have recognized and revered from time immemorial as the soul.

Finding man subject to the same methods of physical measurement to which also the most primitive objects of nature are subject, the psychologist has been tempted to reduce man, for this wholly inadequate and irrelevant reason, to the level of these forces and has yielded to this temptation.

You may remember the famous story of the astronomer at the court of Napoleon who came to the great emperor and said that he had for years been sweeping the heavens with his telescope, and not once had he been able to catch a glimpse of God. We laugh at this story today, but right here in our own time Professor Watson says, "This dogma (of the soul) has been present in human psychology from earliest antiquity. (Yet) no one has ever touched a soul, or has seen one in a test tube."

I call this an evil not because it impairs any conviction or destroys any faiths which are dear to me, but fundamentally because it represents a conclusion which is untrue to the facts, and therefore an error. Our best psychologists today are not only exposing this error, but warning against this evil. Dr. Jung is doing this in Zurich in reaction against the materialistic philosophy of his great teacher, Sigmund Freud. Dr. S. C. Kohs, a distinguished psychologist of our own city, in the current issue of the *Survey* magazine declares:

On the basis of unquestionable evidence, we must accept the notion that we *are* possessed of consciousness, that we *can* will, that we *can* reason, that we *have* moral nature, that all of us *have developed* some scale of moral values . . . For although it may be true that whatever exists can be measured, it is also true that everything that now exists is not yet measurable. It is neither scientific nor wise to assume that whatever is elusive is not real.³

Here is the central point! The "elusive"—that which cannot be measured—is not only not unreal, but may be in our present state of knowledge, the only real. When psychology has said all that it can say in terms of exact science—when its laboratory has measured every idea, weighed every emotion, charted every reaction—there still remains the mystery of "Plato's brain" and the majesty of the "good Christ's heart."

³KOHS, S. C. "We've gone psychiatric." *Survey*, May 15, 1930, 64(4), 188-190.—Dr. Kohs is the originator of the still widely used Kohs Block Design test as it became part of the Wechsler intelligence tests of and the Goldstein-Scheerer series for testing loss of abstract ability.

PROMOTING SELF-CENTEREDNESS

I come now to a second evil done by the psychologists of our time, the obvious and bare fact that psychology turns a man inward upon himself, whereas every other science takes a man out of himself up into the heavens, or down into the earth, far away into the remote areas of history.

The secret of good living is to lose ourselves, forget ourselves, become unconscious of ourselves, in the work we have to do. In the beginning, of course, we have to watch our step, just as we had to watch our step when as children we were learning to walk. But later on our walking got to be automatic—we did not have to think about it! And in the same way our living should get to be automatic in the sense that honesty and truth, kindness and goodwill become the unconscious and spontaneous reaction of our days.

Now it is the tragedy of psychology, that by the very nature of its work, it has to turn the attention of the patient inward upon himself, and make self-consciousness the basis of its operations. If we are to know ourselves, we surely must be deliberately conscious of ourselves. And how disastrous, oftentimes, is the result!

Since I have become interested in psychology, at least in certain of its more modern phases, I seem to have found a specimen of humanity more pitiful than the hypochondriac. The person I have in mind is the psychological maniac who does nothing but watch the stream of his own consciousness, or measure the reactions of his own temperament. How many of these persons I have talked with—always about themselves, and their worries, and their woes, and their loss of happiness, and their frustrations of love, and their illusions of persecution, and their threats of suicide. I dislike to be unsympathetic, but I must be honest and confess thus my conviction that there is only one thing that they need to do and that is to forget themselves. There is only one lesson that they want to learn, and that is to think of others. Self-knowledge is all right—we cannot have too much of it! But the first article of self-knowledge is that “no man liveth unto himself.” Our real self is the larger self which makes contact with humanity.

It is the recognition of this fact which has persuaded Dr. Alfred Adler, I have no doubt, to make that oft-repeated word, “cooperation,” the watch-word of his faith. To those who have read the books of this great psychologist, especially to those who have heard his lectures, it was at first an occasion of amusement, and later of

a deep understanding of final truth, that to every inquiry about a personal difficulty, Dr. Adler replies with the single injunction, "Cooperate! Cooperate!" In repeating always this magic word, is not this distinguished teacher trying to overcome the evil which he knows to be implicit in his science? Is he not trying to rescue his disciples, before it is too late, from that extreme type of self-absorption into which they may be so easily betrayed by showing them that, in the end, there is no salvation save in the love and service to their fellow-men? Having led them *into* themselves in quest of knowledge, Dr. Adler would now lead them *out of* themselves in quest of life.

This was the sanity of Edward Everett Hale,⁴ when he gave it as the maxim of his days, "look up, and not down; look forward, and not back; look out, and not in." This was also the wisdom of Jesus, when he declared, "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

LACK OF SOCIAL CONCERN

This brings me to the last evil which I would specify—an evil which belongs not so much to psychology itself as to the persons who pursue it. I can best get at what I have to say upon this point by speaking of a certain change which has taken place in the public mind since I first went into the ministry something over a quarter of a century ago. In those days the social question was to the fore. Everybody was concerned with problems of poverty, of unemployment, of conditions of labor, or women and children in industry. Young men and women were finding their way into settlement houses and reform societies. Utopia was on the way, and everybody was concerned with speeding its advent among men. But now all this is changed.

There are various reasons for this change, I have no doubt. One of them is the Great War, which blasted our illusions and made us skeptical, cynical and discouraged. Another reason is certainly the new psychology, which has turned us away from the consideration of society and focussed our attention upon the single individual. Nothing seems any longer to be of any concern but inhibitions and repressions, frustrations and sublimations, reflexes, complexes, and the free expression of personality. Especially is the sex life, and its

⁴American clergyman and author, 1822-1909.

myriad ramifications of love and marriage, become suddenly subject of supreme and exclusive interest. We are agreeing, in other words, to neglect everything that concerns the relations of men and women to one another in the organization of society, and are thinking of nothing but the relation of the single man to himself in the organization of his inner being. Get that inner life to be what it ought to be—make the individual to be well-ordered in his conduct and emotion—and we believe that life will be happy and the world will be good.

No evil of our modern psychology, to my mind, is quite so serious as this deliberate distraction of the public mind from great questions of social change to petty questions of individual healing. We are wrong in imagining that we are ever going to save our world and the people in it, by the retail method of bringing psychological knowledge and insight to bear upon the problems of the personal life. This is the mistake made by the Christian church, both Catholic and Protestant, in believing that it could save the world by "saving souls."

The psychological clinic can work its miracles today exactly as the mourning-bench and the baptismal font worked its miracles yesterday! But still there remains the world—this society where wealth works its corruption and poverty its death, where the strong prey upon the weak and the wicked upon the innocent.

Must not psychology fail today, as religion failed yesterday, so long as it is indifferent to injustice and oppression? Is it not inevitable that we should socialize psychology as we have long sought to socialize religion? This certainly is what is seen by Dr. Alfred Adler in his unique recognition of the psychology of "the whole man," by which he means the individual as related to society. Insistent is this psychologist in studying his patient from the standpoint of the place where he lives, the factory where he works, the wages which he earns, the conditions of repression or oppression from which he suffers. For Dr. Adler knows, as some other psychologists know, that the ills of life are predominantly social, and that the individual, therefore, cannot be healed until society has been reformed. Which means that when psychology has at last everywhere become intelligent, it will lead us back to the social question, and teach us again to labor for the coming of the day when "justice shall roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

CONCLUSION

Such, as I see them, are some of the evils of our present-day psychology. First, the materialistic trend of this psychology, to the neglect of those spiritual elements of being which make up the substance of personality. Secondly, the emphasis of this psychology upon self-consciousness and self-expression, to the hazard of those high qualities of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice which are the essence of human living. And thirdly, the emphasis of this psychology on the individual, to the neglect of his social nexus of political and economic forces which are so often the life and death of men.

If I were to justify my criticisms of these evils, I would cite the example of great men like Professor Jung and especially Dr. Adler, who are themselves taking the lead in ridding this precious science of its excess.

Do you ask, when all has been said, what I mean by psychology? I answer—*the awakening of man unto himself, for the service and pity of the world*. I find "the conclusion of the whole matter" in Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Speaking "Of the Virtuous," the prophet says: "That your self be in your action as a mother in her child, this shall be for me your word of virtue."