A Textbook of General Psychology

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Preface

To tell what psychology is about, and to tell it in such a way that students in an introductory course can be led, or lead themselves, from what they already know to a reasonable understanding of the major concepts and developments in the field—these are the aims of this textbook. George Miller, a former president of the American Psychological Association, once made the statement that the main ideas of psychology can be understood by the average sixth grader and that psychologists should be ready to communicate their knowledge to such an audience. Whether or not you believe this to be true, either before or after you read this book, the writer of an introductory textbook is challenged to present his material in a manner that can be easily understood by students with a wide range of backgrounds. For this reason, every attempt has been made to minimize psychological jargon, and, where specialized terms must be used, to define them as clearly as possible.

Psychology, like other fields of study, has burgeoned in the last 40 or so years. More and more people are doing more and more research, and publishing more and more papers, books, and journal articles. It is becoming increasingly difficult for one person to keep up with what is going on in any one area, let alone master the whole. The problem is particularly acute in the introductory course. It has even been suggested that introductory psychology cannot be taught—period; and in some universities the course has been eliminated from the curriculum. Other institutions have taken a circumscribed approach, offering a course with a limited subject matter and objectives, and making no attempt to cover all of the major areas within psychology. While such a solution to the problem of proliferation has some merit, it appears to this writer that there is also merit in the idea that a course in psychology *can* be a significant contribution to a liberal arts education and at the same time provide a prospective major in psychology with enough information to decide whether or not to pursue the field further.

A textbook for such a course should meet certain requirements. First of all, it ought to be short enough that the instructor will not have to eliminate major portions and thereby lose whatever continuity is present. However, it should also be reasonably complete, elaborating the major concepts that have developed in the various fields of psychology. The level of elaboration should be responsive to the question: "If this were the only course in psychology that students would take, what should they know in order to have a reasonable appreciation for the field and to know where to go if they want to

find out more?" Thus, there should not be too much detail in any one area, but there should be enough by way of basic concepts that the student will have an indication of what to expect in more advanced courses.

The textbook in such a course should also be integrative. In spite of the proliferation within the subfields of psychology and the resulting tendency for conceptual separations between areas, there are still some commonalities which tie groups of areas together. Wherever possible, an introductory textbook should make note of these commonalities and show how different areas are related to one another. Such integration can and should be done, but without forcing issues. For example, there are several different approaches to the study of personality. While they are clearly different from each other, each approach has its counterpart in other problem areas, for example, in the case of personality, perception, learning, and thinking. This kind of conceptual commonality should be noted wherever possible. While this book is not organized around common themes, the attempt has been made to deal with them where they are apparent.

Finally, even in a changing world in which psychology and psychological concepts are subject to almost continuous revision, there appears to be merit in maintaining something in the way of traditional modes of organization of the subject matter, if for no other reason than to provide some continuity with the past. Therefore, this textbook is traditional in its organization, while attempting to include the best of current thinking and research. Old findings and ideas, however, are not excluded simply because they are old; many must be included because nothing new and of equal conceptual importance has proven fully satisfactory.

I wish to note that many people have provided me with the counsel, criticism, encouragement, and manual assistance that was necessary for the completion of this book. My editors at Crowell were quite helpful and patient in guiding me through the maze out of which the book eventually emerged. Harold Vetter, Nowell Jones, James Dabbs, and Duane Rumbaugh critically read various portions of the manuscript. Catherine Smith, Diana Dupont, Micah Nichols, Jean Britt, Elaine Wood, and Judy Adelman assisted in the preparation of parts of this book and the instructor's manual. Joyce Thompkins, Patricia Ward, and Mayvin Sinclair typed portions of the manuscript. To all of these people I am deeply appreciative.

Table of Contents

Chapter 4 The Nervous System and Behavior

Chapter 5 Sensing Information in the Environment

Chapter 6 Perceiving

Chapter 7 Conditioning and Instrumental Learning

Chapter 8 Human Learning and Memory: Verbal Skills

Chapter 9 Human Learning and Memory: Motor Skills

Chapter 10 Speech and Language

Chapter 11 Thinking

Chapter 12 Motivation: Preservation of the Individual

Chapter 13 Motivation: Social Motivation

Chapter 14 Emotion