

GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY

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From the Personalistic Standpoint

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NEW YORK

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1938

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Set up and electrotyped. Published February, 1938.



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To the Memory of my Friends

Otto Lipmann

and

Martha Muchow

FROM THE PREFACE TO THE GERMAN EDITION

No science can progress without projecting from time to time a total picture of its field, including methods and data, points of view and theories. Present-day psychology urgently requires a synoptic view of this sort, considering the chaotic outcome of specialization and divergence in the psychological work of a generation. We have had many distinctive psychologies: elementaristic psychology and Gestalt psychology, *verstehende* psychology and analyzing psychology; topological and operationalistic psychology, purposive and mechanistic psychology; psychologies of the unconscious, of consciousness, of behavior, etc.—but no inclusive *general* psychology.

It is the function of the present book to give a new foundation to the *general psychology of the human individual*. The word “general” is here used in a double sense. It opposes one-sided treatments by doing justice to the varied methodological and theoretical approaches to psychological knowledge; and it deals with the *general* aspects, functions, and laws of human mental life in contrast to differential psychological treatment of the peculiarities of types, phases, sexes, races, and individuality.

It goes without saying that the book is based upon authentic modern psychological research. Such work cannot always be reviewed in detail since the book was not conceived as a compendium but as a new foundation for scientific psychology. Nevertheless, every chapter, even every detail of treatment, takes account directly or indirectly of the development of our science. Psychology is now firmly established and impresses its positive importance upon all who come in contact with it. It is a growing collective enterprise giving scope to all who have any contribution to make. Even in those places where our book criticizes or rejects certain points of view, theories, and methods of modern psychology, its indebtedness to the labors of psychology must be acknowledged.

In spite of this basic concern with the whole fabric of psychological specialties, our book will maintain a thoroughly distinctive and novel point of view, diverging from that of traditional psychology. This is the *personalistic* point of view, which here finds its first occasion to demonstrate its fitness to formulate and interpret a particular empirical science. We define psychology as “the science of the person having experience or capable of having experience.” The immediate subject-matter of psychology, *experience*, is therefore to

be identified and interpreted in terms of its matrix, the unitary, goal-directed person. It will become evident that the personalistic hypothesis does not exclude other theories and points of view (except the purely mechanistic), but bears a constructive relationship to them; and although it is homogeneous, one-sidedness is avoided.

Psychology has changed completely since the close of the nineteenth century. This gives rise to a danger that divergence from the views of that period may also neglect the valuable suggestions for which we are indebted to it. It is the manifest duty of an older psychologist who started out under the direct stimulation of that epoch, to seek to preserve continuity and to lead what was vital in it into the channel of progressive development. As this book will demonstrate, this is of course possible only if the older discoveries are placed in new contexts, and if their significance is in part re-interpreted.

The material treated is arranged in six parts. Part One serves wholly as an introduction and is therefore limited to an outline. In the first three chapters a general orientation is given concerning recent and present positions in psychology; the fourth chapter is devoted to the presentation of the personalistic theory, which is foundational to all further special considerations.

The person-world relationship provides the plan for our treatment of the special mental functions. The exposition begins with those areas of mind in which the dependence of the person upon his world is greatest. The tie that binds him to the world situation in the immediate *present* reduces, in terms of experience, to *perception* (Part Two); dependence on *past* states of the world, to *memory* (Part Three). Still other mental functions are characterized by a greater independence of the person as compared with the world. This is manifested in his altered time-relations. The content and course of experience are here determined not by the urgent pressure of the present nor yet by the fixity of the past, but by the ambiguous future or by a temporally indifferent, "super-temporal" region. Thus *thinking* points toward future ends; *imagination* moves in freedom from time, and may point forward or backward, or lack direction. Thought and imagination (Part Four) do not infringe upon the state of the real world; they consequently occupy an intermediate position in the process of emancipation. The highest forms of this emancipation are represented by *volition* (Part Five), where the person tends spontaneously to influence the world; and by *feeling* (Part Six), where he withdraws from the world into himself and his experience. Volition is explicitly directed toward the future. Feeling may occur in all temporal modes; there are feeling-experiences that pertain to present, past, and future, and that are temporally indifferent.

Let it be emphasized that the processes of mind, delimited in this way, must in no sense be regarded as separate mental faculties or compartments; they are simply the various ways in which the experiencing person orients his relation to the world. A formal advantage of the sequence adopted may be seen in its resemblance to the classification commonly used in general psychology. The transition to the new *theoretical* principles required by personalistic psychology will perhaps be rendered somewhat easier by the fact that our organization of the material does not impose demands of a too unfamiliar sort.

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

It is a matter of great satisfaction to me to see an English translation of this book completed. Through it I am able to approach the scholars and students of my new homeland directly, and to add a new psychological doctrine to those already known to the English-speaking world. The reception given the original edition by some representatives of American science raises the hope that the English form of the book may strike a sympathetic note.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Howard Davis Spoerl, whose psychological facility, linguistic delicacy, and indefatigable endeavors contributed to achieve the difficult task of translation. Invaluable aid has been given by my friend Dr. Gordon W. Allport, who carefully read the entire manuscript and furnished much substantial advice. I am also grateful to the staff of the Department of Psychology at Duke University for its help in fixing the English expressions for many German terms.

In translation the text has been revised to meet the requirements of English and American readers. Considerable changes have been made, although these do not affect the substance. In general, they consist of shortenings; there are, however, a few additions resulting from new impressions I have received in this country.

The plan and scope of the bibliography have been considerably altered. The original bibliography, compiled with the careful help of my former assistant, Dr. Betty Katzenstein, now of São Paulo, here appears in six sections appended to the six parts of the book. Many references to more obscure or less essential publications have been eliminated; other items of greater importance to new readers have been added. Foreign books existing in English translation are listed by the English titles, place and date of publication of the latest (or most noted) original edition being added in parentheses.

WILLIAM STERN

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA,
December, 1937.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The happy medium of translation lies somewhere between that literalness which amounts to obscurity and that degree of departure from the original which engenders distortion. In striving to achieve it I have used as a guiding principle the avoidance of technicality in so far as this was consistent with the demands of the original text. Nevertheless, the special usage of certain basic terms should be called to the reader's attention. In particular, the word "experience" is nearly always to be given the intimate emphasis of the verb "to experience." Other terms are adequately defined at appropriate places. As far as possible, terms already translated by others (e.g., Lewin's "valence") have been retained in such translation, in the interests of a standard psychological vocabulary. In a few instances new translations were made of quotations from German authors.

I wish to acknowledge the kind permission of The Duke University Press to reprint that portion of Chapter XXIII which has appeared in *Character and Personality*. This material has been revised for present publication.

No less than Professor Stern I am under obligation to Professor Gordon W. Allport for his encouragement, patient labor, and helpful assistance with many features of our project. I am also indebted to my wife, Dorothy Tilden Spoerl, for assistance in reading proof and preparing the manuscript.

HOWARD DAVIS SPOERL

SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS,
December, 1937.

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