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College of the Pacific
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PSYCHOLOGY AND LIFE

BY

HUGO MÜNSTERBERG

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TO
MY OLD FRIEND
HEINRICH RICKERT
PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF FREIBURG (BREISGAU)





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PREFACE

THE following volume contains six essays which have been brought before the public during the last year at very different opportunities. The paper on History was delivered as the presidential address before the New York meeting of the American Psychological Association, and was published in the "Psychological Review." That on Education was read before the Harvard Teachers' Association at their last Cambridge meeting and printed in the "Educational Review." The essay on Physiology is an extension of a paper read before the American Physiological Society in New York, and has not as yet been published. The three other papers appeared in the "Atlantic Monthly." That on Mysticism was read before the Buffalo meeting of the Unitarian Ministers' Institute, and before the Philosophical Department of Princeton University; that on Art was written for the Detroit meeting of the American Drawing-Teachers' Association, and that on Real Life was an ad-

dress to Wellesley College. Two other papers on educational problems which I have also published during the last year in the "Atlantic Monthly" series, the one under the title "The Danger from Experimental Psychology," and the other "The Teacher and the Laboratory," are not reprinted here because the one was chiefly the criticism of a book and the other a rejoinder to an attack, but they may be mentioned here as supplementary interpretations of my educational views.

While the six essays were thus presented at first to very various audiences, this book is in no way a chance collection of disconnected pieces. The contrary is true. They represent six chapters of a book which was from the first planned as a unity, and the separate publication of the special parts is merely accidental. The group should decidedly be taken as a whole. One fundamental thought controls the book, and each essay leads only from a different point to the same central conviction.

This chief aim is the separation of the conceptions of psychology from the conceptions of our real life. Popular ideas about psychology suggest that the psychological description and explanation of mental facts expresses the reality

of our inner experience. It is a natural consequence of such a view that our ethical and æsthetical, our practical and educational, our social and historical views are subordinated to the doctrines of psychology. These papers endeavor to show that psychology is not at all an expression of reality, but a complicated transformation of it, worked out for special logical purposes in the service of our life. Psychology is thus a special abstract construction which has a right to consider everything from its own important standpoint, but which has nothing to assert in regard to the interpretation and appreciation of our real freedom and duty, our real values and ideals. The aim is thus a limitation of that psychology which wrongly proclaims its results as a kind of philosophy; but this limitation, which makes the traditional conflicts with idealistic views impossible, gives at the same time to the well-understood psychology an absolute freedom in its own field, and the whole effort is thus as much in the service of psychology itself as in the service of the rights of life. A scientific synthesis of the ethical idealism with the physiological psychology of our days is thus my purpose. Every unscientific and unphilosophical synthesis remains there necessarily an

insincere compromise in which science sacrifices its consistency and idealism sacrifices its beliefs ; it is the task of true synthesis to show how the one includes the other, and how every conflict is a misunderstanding.

The first paper gives the fundamental tone and characterizes the problem of the whole book. The second paper, on Physiology, develops the real functions of a scientific psychology, and defends its absolute freedom in the consistent construction of theories of mind and brain. The following three papers show in three important directions, in art, education, and history, how such a consistent psychology, even though most radical, cannot interfere with the conceptions and categories which belong to the activities of life and to their historical aspect. The last paper finally makes a test for this separation, showing that just as psychology is not to interfere with the conceptions of life, these latter must not interfere with the conceptions of psychology ; wherever this happens, the scientific aspect of mental life goes over into mysticism.

The isolated appearance of the different essays has made it necessary that each could be understood alone without presupposing the knowledge of the foregoing papers ; frequent repetitions

were thus unavoidable. It would have been easy to eliminate these in reprinted form, and to link the papers so that each should presuppose acquaintance with the preceding parts. But I have finally decided not to change anything and to publish them again in a form in which every paper can be understood for itself, because I think that in a subject so difficult and so antagonistic to the popular view the chief points of the discussion can have impressive effect only if they are brought out repeatedly, always in new connections and from new points of view. They may be clear, perhaps, at a first reading, but may become convincing only when they are reached from the most different starting-points. If the axe does not strike the same spot several times, the tree will not fall.

It may appear still less excusable that whenever I have had to return to the same points, I have made use of the same expressions like stereotyped phrases. The effect would have been of course much prettier if I had applied a rich variety instead of such a monotony of terms. But it seems to me that in such complicated problems exactness and sharpness of the technical terms is the condition for clearness and consistency, which cannot be replaced by a more

or less æsthetical enjoyment. I do not want to entertain by these papers, I want to fight; to fight against dangers which I see in our public life and our education, in art and science; and only those who intend serious and consistent thought ought to take up this unamusing book.

I say frankly, therefore, that this little volume is not written for those who kindly take an interest in the psychological discussions of the essays, but do not care for the philosophical part which belongs to every one. For such readers much more attractive treatises on the new psychology are abundant. And there is a second group of possible readers to whom also I should seal the little book if I had the power. I refer to those who heartily agree with my general conclusion that no conflict between science and the demands of life exists, but who base this attitude merely on feeling and emotion, and who thus dread the indirect method of abstract conceptions, all the more since they are not troubled by a demand for consistency in science. I have nothing in common with them; I am not a missionary of the Salvation Army. And, finally, I must warn still a third group whose existence I should not have suspected if it had not shown most vehement symptoms of life after the

publication of some of my "Atlantic Monthly" papers. I have in mind those who consider a critical examination of the rights and limits of a science as an attack against that science, instead of seeing that it is the chief condition for a sound and productive growth; the triumph through confusion is in the long run never a real gain for a science. Those who, perhaps with anger, perhaps with delight, consider my warning against a dangerous misuse of psychology, pedagogy, and so on, as an onslaught against psychology or pedagogy itself, certainly misunderstand my intentions.

Finally, I wish to express my thanks to the Assistant in the Psychological Laboratory of Radcliffe College, Miss Ethel Puffer, for the revision of my manuscript, and to the Assistant in the Psychological Laboratory of Harvard University, Dr. Robert MacDougall, for the revision of the proofs. It is needless to say that in spite of their helpful retouching of my language, the whole cast shows the style of the foreigner who is a beginner in the use of English, and who must thus seriously ask for the indulgence of the reader.

HUGO MÜNSTERBERG.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY, February, 1899.

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