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APPLYING PSYCHOLOGY

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This chapter discusses:

- the nature of Psychology as a discipline, subject and profession;
- the application of Psychology to the psychological professions, and to other specialisms and professions;
- the fallacy of distinguishing between 'pure' and 'applied' Psychology;
- the public understanding of Psychology, and why it is often poor;
- critical views of Psychology;
- how Psychology can achieve wider acceptance, and why it should.

INTRODUCTION

A distinction is made between Psychology, a scientific enquiry, and psychology, the subject matter of that enquiry. It is suggested that Psychology, like other such labels, refers to three distinct entities which should be distinguished. The *discipline* is a group of related problems, focused on the human individual, and the methods and findings resulting from investigating these problems. This gives unity to Psychology. The *subject* is organization of material and resources for practical applications including teaching. The *profession* is a body of people practising in various contexts but based on the discipline. Professional psychologists are only a small number of those who obtain the Graduate Basis for Registration of the British Psychological Society (BPS). Some difficulties arising from this are discussed. Psychology can be and is applied in many contexts, and while there are some criticisms of this, it is suggested that a better understanding of human behaviour is fundamental to solving the many problems we face as a species.



In studying this subject we must be content if we attain as high a degree of accuracy as the matter of it admits. (Aristotle, c. 385–322 BCE, *Ethics*)

A science is said to be useful if its development tends to accentuate the existing inequalities in the distribution of wealth, or more directly promotes the destruction of human life. (G.H. Hardy, 1877–1947, mathematician)

We can tell nothing of our fellow men except by seeing what they do or say in particular circumstances ... If we refuse to use observation and experiment on other human beings, we start to regard them as wicked or foolish. I think this is a serious danger, and I have no doubt that the methods of empirical psychology are socially more hygienic, or to use the older and more robust phrase, morally better. (Donald Broadbent, *In Defence of Empirical Psychology*, 1973)

In another memorable quotation, reported by Joshua Reynolds, Dr Johnson remarked:

There are two things which I am confident I can do very well: one is an introduction to any literary work, stating what it is to contain, and how it should be executed in the most perfect manner; the other is a conclusion, shewing from various causes why the execution has not been equal to what the author promised to himself and to the public.

This chapter is not an introduction in Johnson's sense. Those that follow will speak for themselves, and whether his conclusion is necessary can be left to the reader. Rather, I raise some larger issues about what psychology is, and how it is or can be applied.

THE NATURE OF PSYCHOLOGY

I have in front of me a copy of *The Times* for today, 2 March 2011. I can find no mention of the word 'Psychology'. But there is a great deal of psychology. There are items about gender (as it is now called, previously sex) equality, racial prejudice, problem-solving and creativity, crime, aggression and murder, war and conflict, child development, education, mass media, propaganda and persuasion, leadership and, of course, sport. All of absorbing interest to psychologists, and not only professionally.

Psychology and psychology

The useful distinction between Psychology as a discipline or enquiry, and psychology as the subject matter of that enquiry, is due to Graham Richards (1987). This can be applied to any discipline, but it is particularly apt for some. The subject matter of Chemistry is chemistry, processes that can be studied at chemical level, so to say. But those processes are not themselves part of the investigation, only its object. With disciplines concerned with human behaviour the case is different. If the task of History is to understand the past, the whole of it, then what historians have said is part of that past, and has often

helped to shape it. Psychology is more extreme still, for it is itself human behaviour, which is its subject matter. Psychologists themselves, and their theory and practice, are necessarily something that requires a psychological explanation. In other words, Psychology is by its nature reflexive. So too are other disciplines dealing with human beings, Anthropology, History, Sociology and so on. But the issue is most pertinent to Psychology because it focuses (I argue) on the individual human being. The argument can be taken further. Richards (1996) suggests that the language that Psychology uses itself constitutes psychology: 'Nobody before Freud had an Oedipus complex ... nobody before c. 1914 had a high IQ ... To put it bluntly, Psychology is produced by, produces, and is an instance of, its own subject matter.' This is not, as I understand it, a social constructivist view. *H. sapiens* must always have had intellectual capabilities, if not an IQ.

Medical examples

Consider two medical examples (not from Richards). In former times people often suffered from 'ague'. Today it is sometimes said that this was malaria (or influenza, or rheumatic fever). It was not. It was ague. The symptoms were real, but they were classified differently, and without knowledge of the disease entities. Malaria existed as a disease, but not as a medical or psychological reality. Similarly with schizophrenia, which did not exist until Eugene Bleuler invented it, or identified it as he would have said, in 1911 (Boyle, 1988). Since then there has been a long history of seeking to find the causes of schizophrenia by studying 'schizophrenics', that is, samples of persons diagnosed as such. Considerable progress has been made, though the process risks being circular. A leaflet on schizophrenia produced by the Royal College of Psychiatrists states that schizophrenia is 'a disorder of the mind which affects how you think, feel and behave' (para 3). The word 'schizophrenia' is used 'because there is not yet a better one for the pattern of symptoms and behaviours described' (para 2). But those symptoms and behaviours are so varied and inconsistent as hardly to merit the word 'pattern'. For example, they may or may not include hearing voices, and hearing voices may or may not indicate a disorder. This is even more the case if one considers different cultures and periods, in some of which hallucinations of various kinds can be normal or signs of exceptional gifts, such as receiving messages from the gods. Of course, it is not that there are no such things as hallucinations, or mental disorders, rather that Psychology and its subject matter are in a constant state of interaction and creation. And much of it depends on probabilities and reasonable estimates, just as Aristotle said. There are very real consequences for treatment and for public attitudes.

DISCIPLINE, SUBJECT AND PROFESSION

Discipline

An implicit assumption is perhaps that because there is a word 'schizophrenia', there must be a disease entity corresponding to it. But that is just what has to be found out. A similar fallacy has often underlain attempts to say what psychological concepts 'really' mean, for example intelligence (Radford, 1995), and indeed what 'Psychology'

itself is, and particularly whether or not it is a unity (Radford, 2004). 'Psychology' is one word, and thus there must be one thing to which it refers. I have argued, I think first in Radford and Rose (1989), that words such as Chemistry, History or Psychology commonly refer to at least three distinguishable entities, which it is desirable not to confuse. I label them discipline, subject and profession. By a *discipline* I mean a set of problems that appear to be related, and the methods, theories and bodies of knowledge that are created in investigating them. A discipline is not defined by a list of subject matter, but by a focus; what the problems appear to have in common. The focus is not fixed but may change over time. It may be relatively wide or narrow. The focus of History can be either. A limited focus is the recorded past; a very wide one is all that has occurred. Obviously the first is a subset of the second. The focus of Psychology could be the individual human being, or *H. sapiens*, or living things, but a better label for that is Biology. I prefer 'individual', but that can only be understood as being at the centre of the other two – three concentric circles. Every discipline is more or less closely related to others. Psychology is close to Anthropology, Biology, Sociology and History. The individual might be seen as where all of these 'circles' intersect. Slightly more distant might appear Geography, Economics, Statistics, while Geology seems quite a long way off, but you never know. The 'circles' are imaginary. Disciplines are not static, and they do not have boundaries. New disciplines constantly emerge, and it is a matter of opinion and convenience when they should be regarded as independent. They are not territories. It is impossible to say in advance where new knowledge relevant to a problem will emerge. And it is absurd to reject it on the grounds that it is not part of a particular discipline. Anything at all may, in principle, be grist for the psychologist's mill. At the same time the focus on related problems and methods does, in my view, give unity to a discipline, however varied its practitioners may be.

Subject

I use the word '*subject*' to refer to the use of disciplinary material for purposes of dissemination and application. Unlike a discipline, a subject is legitimately territorial.

In education or in practice, it must have space, specialized accommodation, equipment, staff, support services and so on. All these depend in the last resort on attracting students, clients or other sources of finance. Psychology has often had to fight to be considered a 'science' subject, or a legitimate speciality, and this is not merely for prestige but because they relate directly to funding. One has to deal with the mundane needs of a subject as much as the vaulting ambitions of a discipline. Discipline content must also be ordered if it is to be conveyed to others. This is part of applying Psychology. A library is little use without a catalogue, but any classification system must be a partly arbitrary fitting of overlapping and inter-related material into boxes. Any educational course must be a selection from what its title might suggest (and usually more than that). An honours degree in Psychology cannot cover anything like all that is available, and should also include something from related disciplines. A syllabus must be strictly defined, if only because it is a licence to examine. A student may be asked about what is in it, and must not be penalized for not knowing what is not. Books and journals

must have some limits. The question then is, how to make the selection. In the case of a book, it is up to the author to defend the choice – or an editor to impose one. A practitioner similarly draws on one or more disciplines. The criterion must surely be relevance to the purposes of the education, dissemination or practice.

In education, there are three general cases. In one, Psychology is a component of training for something other than professional psychology. Teaching, social work, nursing, medicine, police work, management are obvious examples and there are many others. A second case is general, non-vocational education, such as most GCE A-levels. The third case is courses, specifically first degrees, that are preparation for a psychological career. The second and third cases overlap, due to the well-known fact that of those who graduate (major) in Psychology, only some 15 to 20% will go on to a professional psychological career. The majority have careers that may or may not involve Psychology directly or indirectly. (Former students of mine have taken up jewellery making, journalism, picture-framing, market gardening, managing pop groups, working the stock market, menswear retailing and many other trades. Some at least have said they value their degree.)

Profession

By a *profession* I mean a body of people who are usually but not always formally qualified, but who conform more or less to the characteristics I discuss in more detail elsewhere in this volume (Chapter 18), including a commitment to the best interests of the client, a shared basis of knowledge both theoretical and practical, accountability for what is achieved rather than for specific procedures, responsibility of the individual practitioner and autonomy of the professional group. Like a subject, a profession is legitimately territorial. It is right for medical practitioners to try to ensure that quacks are seen for what they are, and prevented from doing harm. This is, however, a double-edged weapon. It can result in rejecting new advances merely because they are not accepted practice, or have arisen through unconventional routes. Professionals must not seek to extend their control beyond their competence, and must respect the role of other professionals (which does not mean necessarily deferring to it). Protection of the public can lapse into concealment of malpractice. There must be robust monitoring systems with external input. Professions are usually linked to one main discipline, but often draw on several others. Medicine is a profession based on the discipline of Medicine, focused on the treatment of disorders, but which also draws on many others that exist in their own right, including Psychology.

Professions may be defined both informally, as above, and formally. The formal criteria for psychological professions normally include academic qualifications, Chartered status granted by the BPS and, since 2009, for seven domains of psychological practice, registration with the Health Professions Council (HPC)¹. This last is the outcome of a prolonged campaign for legal establishment, which has ended, by governmental insistence, in a more or less shot-gun wedding, inasmuch as many professional psychologists have little or nothing to do with health as such. The domains are occupational, clinical, forensic, counselling, health, educational, and sport and exercise.

¹Also known as the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

The effect is that no one may legally describe themselves as any of these varieties of psychologist without being registered. The generic term 'psychologist' is not protected, and anyone may describe themselves as one. The argument is that it would be impossible to set standards that would apply to all varieties. In addition, it was felt that psychologists in research or teaching should be able to describe themselves as such, but should not have to be registered.

APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

'Psychology', then, can refer to all these things. As I have tried to show, they are not aspects of the same thing. This is relevant, I think when considering how Psychology can be or should be 'applied', for example to the training of other specialists. One approach to this is essentially to give a potted version of 'Psychology', the discipline, and then try to show its relevance. Another method is to ask what a lawyer or a medical general practitioner (GP) has to do, and then what, if anything, there is in the psychological cupboard, so to say, that could be of use to him or her. These are not absolute opposites, rather a matter of emphasis. One example of the first, to my mind, is *Psychology and the Teacher*, by Dennis Child (2007), and of the other, *The Psychology of Behaviour at Work*, by Adrian Furnham (2005). The titles themselves suggest the difference. To the question of what is relevant, we should not be afraid to say, nothing. It does not follow from the all-embracing aims of the *discipline*, that there is anything valuable for a particular *subject* or *profession*. Increasingly, there is, but there is still an obligation to prove it.

Applied psychologists

'Applied Psychology' usually refers, as it does in this volume, mainly to psychologists who work in particular specialisms. In the past, it has sometimes been used in particular for work concerned with occupations and organizations, but now is extended to many other areas. The BPS uses the term "Types of Psychologist" on its website (BPS, n.d.). I think this is misleading. All psychologists share, in principle, a common background in their first degrees. Further qualifications are more specialized for different fields, but, as Hartley and Branthwaite (1989) put it, 'the work which psychologists actually do in these various areas has more similarities than differences'. (I would say that the discipline is the same also.) 'It is the subject matter of their jobs that differs, rather than the roles, skills and ways of working.' Hartley and Branthwaite describe seven overlapping roles that psychologists may need to fill, regardless of specialism: counsellor, colleague, expert, toolmaker, detached investigator, theoretician and change agent. Bekerian and Levey (2005) rather similarly express this as psychologists working in different 'rooms': crime, court, work, war, treatment, sport. It is true that some specialists feel strongly that they should be clearly distinguished from others, and hence agree with the present system of Chartered status as specifically Clinical, Occupational and so on. My guess is that this means rather little to the general public, who would more readily understand a generic title of Chartered Psychologist. I have not seen any investigation of this hypothesis.

Professionals also like to distinguish themselves sharply from the unqualified, as I discuss elsewhere in this volume. This distinction runs more widely in higher education (Radford, 2003a; Radford et al., 1997). There is a long tradition, going back at least two hundred years now, of upholding a dichotomy between the 'pure' and the 'applied'. Warnock (1988), for example, in *A Common Policy for Education*, referred to the distinction, 'the most important there is' between 'the *practical* and the *theoretical*'. A reviewer in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, on 27 May 1988, commented:

... teaching the English language as part of a national curriculum is practical, and therefore right; but teaching English literature is theoretical and not 'user-oriented'. So its separation from language becomes 'a matter of urgency'. Yet it is difficult to imagine how an effective teacher of language, seeking a creative response, could fail to draw on examples from literature.

Pure and applied

Even more strongly may it be questioned whether there is a useful distinction between pure and applied Psychology. In the first place, a great deal of Psychology originated in practical problems. To give just one familiar example, one of the roots of the investigation, indeed discovery, of systematic individual differences was the famous occasion in 1796 when the Astronomer Royal, Nevil Maskelyne, a meticulous observer, dismissed his assistant, named Kinnebrook, because the latter's recordings of a particular event, stellar transits, were consistently slower than his own. Much later, in 1820, another astronomer, Bessel, guessed correctly that this might have been due not to carelessness but to differences in what we now call reaction times. This was really a fundamentally new and important concept, upsetting the notions that thought was effectively instantaneous, and that all human minds worked in the same way. It is not too much to say that individual differences are fundamental to all psychological work. A later stage in the same story was the development of psychometric measurements; again, partly from a practical problem, occasioned by the introduction of education for all children. It soon appeared that some seemed incapable of benefiting from it, and Alfred Binet, a medical doctor in France, was asked to devise a way of picking them out. He came up with a test of 'mental age', based essentially on what an average child might be expected to do at each year of life. This was the beginning of what became intelligence tests, which took off in a big way from yet another practical problem. This arose when the USA entered the First World War in 1917, and was faced with handling large numbers of new army recruits, some unable to read English. A group of psychologists developed the Army Alpha (for English readers) and Army Beta (for others) tests of intelligence. Between September 1917 and January 1919, 1,750,000 men were tested with Alpha. For the full stories see Boring (1957) and Tuddenham (1966) among others. Intelligence tests, and psychometrics generally, have been used, misused and abused for alleged harm they have done, but they remain a prime example of applied Psychology.

Secondly, it can be argued from the reflexive nature of Psychology that it cannot be other than applied. Psychologists, as part of our own subject matter, cannot stand completely apart from it, as a mathematician or a chemist could reasonably be said to do. Sigmund Freud discovered one example of this when he found that he had to deal not only with a patient's reactions to him, but with his own to the patient, the counter-transference as it came to be called. More generally, nearly all, if not all, the matters to which Psychology is applied, directly involve people, and frequently decisions that affect them. The psychologist's own attitudes, opinions and beliefs must come into this. I will return to this, but my view would be that one can be aware of it, and try to balance objectivity with human concern.

Thirdly, Psychology often exemplifies the 'blue skies' problem. There is constant pressure on scientists, from funding bodies and politicians, to make their work 'relevant'. One answer to this is that it is never possible to say exactly what work will turn out to have practical applications. A tiny psychological example is perhaps short-term memory for digits. This was investigated for years in the hope of understanding memory itself. It suddenly turned out to be very relevant when all-digit telephone numbers were introduced.

PREPARATION FOR APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

Professional training

Applied psychologists normally have some specialized training, as described elsewhere. But all (in the UK) are expected to have a first degree (or equivalent) approved by the BPS as the Graduate Basis for Registration (GBR). I and others have suggested previously two main criticisms of this (e.g. Gale, 2002; Radford, 2008). One is that it is too narrow, and too focused on content at the expense of skills and experience. The aim is to ensure that graduates have covered the 'core areas' of Psychology discipline knowledge. Gale pointed out that several years may pass between graduating and even starting professional training, let alone entering a career, while psychological content can change rapidly. And as I suggested above, a Psychology graduate really ought to know at least something of various other approaches to human behaviour. My preference, for what it is worth, would be to start not from lists of content, but from the methodology and context of Psychology. To put it simply, how and why we (and others) go about investigating behaviour. The second criticism is that the whole concept of GBR is misconceived. If the purpose is to maintain and enhance professional standards, the way to do this is to ensure, first, that on qualifying, an individual is equipped to do what she or he has to do. A professional qualification is like a driving test, an assurance of minimum competence. Second, that the individual understands and accepts the principles of professional work, as I discuss elsewhere. The GBR at present seeks to ensure *professional* standards by defining the *subject*, i.e. of the first degree, and hence, since students will take only one such degree, the *discipline*.

General education

We are left with the large body of students with GBR qualification, but for whom Psychology is not clearly vocational, which includes the majority of first degrees and

effectively all pre-degrees. Some may be doing it simply out of interest, or to make up a timetable. But we must surely hope that it will be of some value to them. I suggest two ways in which Psychology may apply, though they are not sharply distinct. One is relevance to what students will do, now and later. To make an obvious point, all students study (at least in principle), and they may want to, or have to, go on doing so in later life. Psychology tells us how to study better. All or virtually all students will enter a job, perhaps cope with unemployment or change of career, marry and rear children, manage a household, deal with retirement, old age, illness and bereavement of themselves and family, have a social and recreational life and so on and so forth. To all of this, psychological knowledge is relevant. The second way is more generally educational, for want of a better word. What this means has varied widely across human societies. But it is generally seen to involve both some form of personal, individual development, and some form of service or contribution to other individuals and wider society. And it would be odd to urge one of these without the other. Both are intimately related to Psychology. They are hardly possible without an attempt to understand why we and others behave as we do. For most of history such attempts have rested on tradition, folk wisdom, religion, superstition, personal preferences and prejudices, and so on. Psychology offers the hope of a more systematic and empirically based attempt, one which has made worthwhile progress and promises more. Many others have developed this theme at length, e.g. Miller (1969), Broadbent (1973), Zimbardo (2004), MacKay (2008).

OTHER PERSPECTIVES

The popular view

There are at least two other ways of looking at Applied Psychology. One is that of the non-psychologist, the general public. They are the main consumers of Psychology, and they pay for it either directly as clients or indirectly, through government agencies or organizations that employ psychologists and pass on the costs to customers. The other perspective is that of a number of varying views grouped together as 'critical' or 'radical' Psychology, to the effect that much of the discipline is not beneficial, or even positively harmful, and that it ought to be much more pro-active in changing society in various ways.

In the first case, it might seem that a reflexive science would be particularly interested in understanding how it is seen by others. Published research on this is somewhat scanty, but overall gives a fairly consistent picture. Psychology is regarded reasonably favourably, but is not well understood, particularly as regards its scientific nature and wide range of activities. Anderson (2006) reported a study done in the mid-1990s in the USA, in which 1087 adults were interviewed by telephone. Asked what psychologists do, 45% said 'help with problems, counselling' and 30% 'study behaviour, analyse people'. Multiple responses were allowed, but there were no other major ones. Respondents were asked which of psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker they would be most likely go to for help with various problems. Psychologists were

favoured for stress, marriage, children, bereavement, work or illness related. Psychiatrists were chosen for mental illness, suicidal tendencies, severe depression and anxiety. Social workers were apparently not first choice for anything. Other questions were not really relevant to the UK; for example 80% said psychologists work in private practice.

Howard and Bauer (2001) drew on references in the press to 'psychology' which the BPS has collected since the 1980s, in particular those from the *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, 1988 to 1999. The most notable finding was that coverage increased fourfold in that period, which contrasts with a twofold increase in that for science. They also found that treatment of Psychology became more serious and less ironic or facetious, with 85% of references considered serious by 1999. A closer analysis suggested, however, that Psychology has to some extent become assimilated to the supernatural; it is more accepted, but partly because 'it is affiliated to the religious desire for an explanation of evil'. Bailey (2010 and personal communication), using focus groups and an online survey, found attitudes generally favourable to Psychology, but accurate knowledge somewhat deficient. Mills (2009) reports a survey of 1,000 randomly sampled adults in the USA, with 82% regarding Psychology very or fairly favourably. Psychology was not however considered a 'hard science' comparable with Biology, Chemistry, Physics or Medicine. It was concerned with treating individuals, like medicine, but was more akin to psychiatry and social work.

An unusual approach was taken by Hartwig (2002) who asked respondents (Australian, seventy-one female, forty-eight male) to draw 'a psychologist'. While the results were variegated, it appeared that a sort of 'typical' psychologist was a male in a suit and tie, bald or balding, with glasses. This is surprising, because perhaps the most robust finding about how psychology appears to the general public is that it is more appropriate for females than males, both as an occupation and as a subject to study. Data support this from the USA, various European countries including the UK, and China (Radford and Holdstock, 1995; Radford and Holdstock with Wu Rongxian, 1999). It is of course borne out by the fact that recruitment to degree and pre-degree courses is invariably around 75–80% female. It appears that this relates to attitudes towards both disciplines and occupations varying along a masculinity/femininity dimension, which in turn relates broadly to interests in things versus people. Psychology is seen as concerned with people, and thus tends to attract the more 'feminine' oriented students, who naturally tend to be female. It does seem a cause for concern that a discipline that, by definition applies to all people, should attract such a biased sample, and should not be generally better understood. (For a further detailed discussion see Lilienfeld, 2012.)

Critical Psychology

The second perspective has been variously explored at least since the early 1970s, e.g. Brown (1973). It is by no means a unified view, but there are some frequently expressed themes (Fox et al., 2009). One is that Psychology puts too much stress on the individual and individualism, which hinders the development of mutuality and strengthens social

injustice. 'Mainstream' Psychology accepts uncritically the values of Western, capitalist society, which depend on an 'individualistic world view that sees economic class as a natural rather than a constructed state of affairs'. The underlying assumptions and allegiances of mainstream Psychology disproportionately hurt the powerless and marginalized by facilitating inequality and oppression. This occurs regardless of psychologists' individual or collective intentions to the contrary. Some psychologists contribute directly to oppression, for example by advising on methods of torture. The majority however seek to help individuals, but tend to do so by, as it were, fitting them back into the social and economic settings that caused the problems in the first place. Mainstream Psychology seeks to provide impartial scientific knowledge, but unlike Anthropology, Sociology, History and even Law, has not fully embraced reflexivity, and realized that 'social science is neither neutral nor value-free' (Fox, 2009).

The essence of critical Psychology, according to Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002), is 'standing with disadvantaged people, speaking out against social injustice, and acting for social change. Psychology needs to get more political'. Fox (n.d.: para 3) asserts that 'social justice is central'. A problem with this is that what counts as social justice is not a given but is itself culturally variable. Critical psychologists feel that the mainstream view is restricted to one ethos, that of Western capitalism, but a similar charge might be made against them. 'Social justice' might seem obviously to entail abolition of slavery and of rigid hierarchical structures. But many societies have felt, on the contrary, that social justice depends on them. Slavery was a normal condition of society in antiquity, while the feudal system of mediaeval Europe, the caste system in India and the 'four categories' of people in China were all seen as essential to a stable and ordered society. Individual psychologists should certainly be politically aware, as all citizens ideally should. We should also realize that dominant theories and methods may not be as objective as we would wish, and may have arisen from, or be biased by, unquestioned assumptions that have little to do with scientific enquiry. Psychology, as a reflexive discipline, does not comprise completely objective observations of neutral matter. Perhaps in the last resort no science does. It is possible, nevertheless, to be more objective or less, to acknowledge our own involvement and yet pursue a scientific enquiry. It is another matter to urge that 'Psychology' should take a political stand and seek to change society in a particular direction, and not only because Psychology is not an agent for deliberate change or anything else. Only individuals can be such agents.

But individual psychologists, like everyone else, will vary in their views of what is right and wrong. For example, Seligman and Fowler (2011) mount a robust defence of the work of psychologists in the armed forces. As they point out, not all will agree. They argue that the (American) military carry out policies determined by a democratically elected government. Further, that those policies are aimed at preserving democratic government from forces seeking to overthrow it. It is the duty of psychologists to assist in this. This takes us back to the previous point, in that it assumes the inherent rightness of democratic over other forms of government. Ultimately this is a matter of values, and thus of debate, not facts. Psychological science can contribute, it may be suggested, in various ways. One is by helping to keep it a matter of debate rather than open conflict, through the study of decision-making, conflict resolution and so on. Another is by

showing what conditions lead to what effects, for example what treatment tends to reduce criminal recidivism. More widely, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) present much evidence that more equal societies tend to score more highly on almost all 'good' criteria, such as low rates of crime, suicide, etc. A third way involves seeking an empirical basis for values, such as human rights. Warnock (2010), taking her cue from Aristotle, has argued that rights can only exist as general agreements, often enshrined in law. They cannot be absolute. They are not inherent in human beings, nor are they divinely granted. Slaves (not her example) do not have a right to be free; indeed it is precisely the lack of such a right that constitutes being a slave. It is a question rather of whether there is a general consensus that all people ought to be free. Here, although Warnock does not say so, social or psychological science comes in. Seligman (e.g. Seligman et al., 2005) and Hauser (2006) report just such widespread consensus on ethical and moral issues across many cultures, races and religions.

CONCLUSION

'My mind's made up, don't confuse me with facts' is attributed to Samuel Goldwyn the film producer. Whether authentic or not, it points to two problems of Applied Psychology. One is that the nature of any applied work is that it often has to be done in the absence of conclusive evidence. Physicians and psychologists must treat patients, film producers must commit resources or not, and so on. In the case of the first two, and similar occupations, we must rely on clinical judgement, which in turn rests on professional training, experience and commitment to standards. The other problem is that even when we have convincing evidence, it may not be accepted by its intended recipients. Munro (2011) discusses how prior beliefs may cause rejection of evidence that runs counter to them. This may be a particular problem for psychology, for various reasons. Psychology often does not carry the prestige of 'hard' science, of which it lacks some of the trappings such as white coats and laboratories. There is a general (usually correct) assumption that human behaviour is less predictable than are inanimate objects.

Psychological findings are nearly always in terms of probabilities rather than absolutes, and are thus harder to grasp. Some people feel that psychological findings are derived from and possibly influenced by the ideology of the researcher (as 'critical psychologists' aver). Then too, we are all perforce experts in human behaviour, or at least have experience of it and generally firm ideas about it. Nevertheless, there are ways of increasing acceptance of scientific findings about ourselves, in the longer term, Munro suggests, by better education (see also Tan and Halpern, 2006).

Human problems

In the longer term too, one more quotation: 'If the world is to be saved at all, it will be saved by Psychology'. This was quoted by Professor C.A. Mace when he greeted new students including me over fifty years ago. He attributed it to Abraham Maslow but I have been unable to find a specific reference. In the short term, Psychology has done and is doing an ever-increasing amount of valuable applied work, as this volume I hope illustrates (in contrast to the pessimistic view of G.H. Hardy). In the longer term, or

even in the medium, it hardly needs repeating that the problems we humans face – conflict of all kinds, ignorance and prejudice, disease and starvation, failure to deal with natural disasters and all the rest – are the result of human behaviour. We must understand ourselves better. That is Applied Psychology.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- 1 Is the overwhelmingly feminine intake to Psychology courses a problem for Applied Psychology?
- 2 Should Psychology be more political?
- 3 How can the public image of Psychology be improved?
- 4 Are there too many Psychology graduates?
- 5 What has Applied Psychology done for us?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Donaldson, S.I., Berger, D.E. and Pezdek, K. (eds) (2006) *Applied Psychology: New Frontiers and Rewarding Careers*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Discussions of the growth of Applied Psychology particularly in the USA, and new approaches and applications, by different authors.
- Fagan, T.K. and VandenBos, G.R. (1993) *Exploring Applied Psychology: Origins and Critical Analysis*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Chapters by different authors on various branches and how they developed, mainly from an American point of view.
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- Richards, G. (1996) *Putting Psychology in its Place: An Introduction from a Critical Historical Perspective*. London: Routledge. This is a more argumentative account seeking to show some of the pressures, attitudes and assumptions that have shaped the discipline.