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Explanation in Psychology

I shall begin this paper by quoting and annotating a few explanations in psychology. Although they form an historical sequence I have culled them from random reading in the past and not from a special study. After hearing them it would be easy to pillory either the ideas or the authors. But before you do you might like to ask the questions 'Are we so far even now from what is said in these statements?' 'Do we not in trying to understand human nature and human mental function make just as many logical blunders?'

Let us start with a quotation from Plato. It is from the *Timaeus* and he is speaking of the Gods.

> 'And since they shrank from polluting the divine element with these mortal feelings more than was absolutely necessary, they located the mortal element in a separate part of the body, and constructed the neck as a kind of isthmus and boundary between head and breast to keep them apart. The mortal element they secured in the breast and trunk (as we call it); and since it has a better and a worse part, they divided the hollow of the trunk by inserting the midriff as a partition, rather as a house is divided into men and women's quarters.
>
> The part of the soul which is the seat of courage, passion, and ambition they located nearer the head between midriff and neck; there it would be well-placed to listen to the commands of reason and combine with it in forcibly restraining the appetites when they refused to obey the word of command from the citadel. They stationed the heart, which links the veins and is the source of the blood which circulates through the body's members, in the guardroom, in order that when passion was roused to boiling point by news of wrong being done, whether by external action or internally by the appetites, commands and threats should circulate quickly through

> the body's narrow ways, and any sentient part of it listen obediently and submit to the control of the best. And because they knew that the swelling of the heart which makes it throb with suspense or anger was due to fire, they devised relief for it in the structure of the lung, which they made soft and bloodless, full of cavities like a sponge, and so able, by absorbing breath and drink, to provide relief and ease from the heat. For this reason they cut the channels of the windpipe to the lung and set it round the heart like a cushion, so that when passion was at its height, the heart would beat against something yielding, be refreshed, and so because less distressed, better able to assist courage in the service of reason.'[1]

That is an explanation all right. It is an attempt to link together quite a large number of facts, a lot of information about human behaviour into quite an unsuitable pattern. It sounds ludicrous to us now to hear two entirely different things fused together; crude anatomical divisions of the body not yet functionally understood and parts of the soul anatomically understood. Crude mental functions like hot passion being regarded as the equivalent of hot blood which therefore needs cooling by air. A neck of land may be an isthmus, but only when anatomy was objectively studied did the analogy stand revealed as false when applied to the animal neck.

You might also object strongly to the teleological argument which pervades the whole. I do think, however, that it is there, not on the same level of error as the things that have just been mentioned, but there because it is extremely difficult to avoid when talking of man.

Now here is a longer quotation from Aristotle. Though this is so old, the ideas expressed in it remained current in Europe for almost 2,000 years afterwards. I wonder even now if we are all that far from the humoral views of man's emotional behaviour. Note in the passage, the same danger of equating uncritically apparent similarities.

> 'For as one man is momentarily, while drunk, another is by nature: one man is loquacious, another emotional, another

[1] Plato, *Timaeus*, tr., H. D. P. Lee, 1965, London, Penguin, pp. 95–6.

easily moved to tears; for this effect, too, wine has on some people. Hence Homer said in the poem:

'He says that I swim in tears like a man that is heavy with drinking.'

Sometimes they also become compassionate or savage or taciturn – for some relapse into complete silence, especially those melancholics who are out of their minds. Wine also makes men amorous; this is shown by the fact that a man in his cups may even be induced to kiss persons whom, because of their appearance or age, nobody at all would kiss when sober. Wine makes a man abnormal not for long, but for a short time only, but a man's natural constitution does it permanently, for his whole lifetime; for some are bold, others taciturn, others compassionate and others cowardly by nature. It is therefore clear that it is the same agent that produces character both in the case of wine and of the individual nature, for all processes are governed by heat. Now melancholy, both the humour and the temperament, produce air; wherefore the physicians say that flatulence and abdominal disorders are due to black bile. Now wine too has the quality of generating air, so wine and the melancholy temperament are of a similar nature. The froth which forms on wine shows that it generates air; for oil does not produce froth, even when it is hot, but wine produces it in large quantities, and dark wine more than white because it is warmer and has more body.

It is for this reason that wine excites sexual desire, and Dionysus and Aphrodite are rightly said to belong together, and most melancholy persons are lustful. For the sexual act is connected with the generation of air, as is shown by the fact that the virile organ quickly increases from a small size by inflation. Even before they are capable of emitting semen, boys approaching puberty already find a certain pleasure in rubbing their sexual organs from wantonness, the manifest reason being that the air escapes through the passage through which the fluid flows later on. Also the effusion and impetus of the semen in sexual intercourse is clearly due to propulsion by air. Accordingly those foods and liquids which fill the region of the sexual organs with air have an aphrodisiac

effect. Thus dark wine more than anything else makes men such as the melancholics are. That they contain air is obvious in some cases; for most melancholy persons have firm flesh and their veins stand out, the reason being the abundance not of blood but of air. However, the reason why not all melancholics have hard flesh and why not all of them are dark but only those who contain particularly unhealthy humours, is another question.'[2]

Do note that delightfully frank ending which undercuts the whole of the preceding argument.

Black bile was a concept, a figment of the imagination (even we cannot improve much on melancholia) but the occurrence of black urine is not. It is an observable phenomenon, the nature of which has only recently been understood. But that does not prevent some questionable conclusions being drawn from it. In a recent paper on the illness of George the Third MacAlpine and Hunter infer that he suffered from Porphyria of which one sign is urine which darkens. They cannot prove this but it is a reasonable and interesting hypothesis. However, here is part of their conclusion:

'While historians and biographers will have to take a fresh look at George III, we as doctors may ponder on the state of psychiatry today in the light of his illness. Should we not ask ourselves to what extent there exists a separate group of disorders of the mind and whether we are not dealing with physical diseases which show early, marked mental symptoms? One may suspect that if psychiatric patients were submitted to modern methods of investigation like other patients, labels like manic depressive psychosis and schizophrenia would soon dwindle if not disappear like the old and, in its time, equally hallowed diagnosis of fever, they would then be seen as symptoms of a disease process instead of being taken for the disease itself.'[3]

[2] Quoted from Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, 1964, London, Nelson, pp. 20–22.

[3] I. MacAlpine and R. Hunter, *Proc. R. Soc. Med.*, 1968, vol. 61, 10.

That is a remarkably sweeping statement based upon interesting but still hypothetical information. It is marred by the fact that they seem to want to sweep explanation into physical, that is mechanistic, paths. The psychological and psychiatric interpretation of history is a popular and seductive exercise. It is important and valid but its product has been continuously marred by reductionism which is shown only too clearly in this quotation. I doubt if the authors would urge that the whole of the aetiology of mental disease be reassessed in the light of the processes at work in this one case, but as it stands it would appear that they do. Historically human actions can be recorded, so may patterns of action and similarities with those of other persons and other categories of behaviour. Predictions about intention and motivation made before the events occur can be no more fully explanatory of them than the answers usually given by an artist when asked to explain why he created a particular object and what its meaning is to him. Inferences made *post hoc* must possess even greater uncertainty.

A man's behaviour is not wholly accounted for by so-called psychological interpretations, however ingenious. Many are lamentably crude. St. Paul is neither explained, or dismissed by calling him an epileptic or a schizophrenic. Bishop Berkeley's philosophy is not accounted for by the fact that he had a markedly anal character, though this suggestion is more surely based than the other one. Epilepsy may affect the personality of the sufferer though by no means always nor anything like it, does it do so. It is legitimate to describe an 'anal erotic' character (and I suppose an addiction to tar water supports this) but both of these things are only facets of a man. However in saying this I am anticipating my later argument.

A further example of an explanation in psychology is a very early one of Freud's. It is the résumé of an encyclopaedia article on hysteria published in 1888 which I am deliberately isolating from its context. I use it as another example of how an explanation couched in terms of pre-existing ideas and experience may lead to falsification and confusion.

'By way of summary we may say that hysteria is an anomaly of the nervous system which is based on a different distribu-

tion of excitations probably accompanied by a surplus of stimuli in the organ of the mind. Its symptomatology shows that this surplus is distributed by means of conscious and unconscious ideas. Anything which alters the distribution of excitations in the nervous system may cure hysterical disorders: such effects are in part of a physical and in part of a directly psychical nature.'[4]

Freud who was a front rank neuro-physiologist of his time was attempting to understand a form of human behaviour which was either ignored or totally misconceived by most of his contemporaries. Here it seems to me that he shows very strikingly the confusion that is created by trying to express ideas about human behaviour, not in behavioural, operational or psychological terms but in neurophysiological energy ones; describing things in terms of the machine and not the operator. Whereas hysteria is the one condition *par excellence* when you cannot legitimately do this. In fairness to Freud I must say that he abandoned a much more systematic attempt at this type of explanation less than ten years after this one was written, because he realized that it was impossible.

My last but most recent example is the responsibility of a newspaper, and not that of the author being discussed in it. In a recent *Times* Science Report there appeared a note headed 'Why men become criminals'.[5]

It begins:

'Within the past few years it has become clear that some men may be predisposed to violent crime by virtue of possessing an extra chromosome. This, at least, is one of the inferences that can be drawn from surveys which have been carried out among mentally subnormal men at a variety of criminal institutions in Britain and the United States.

A chromosome abnormality thought to be exceptionally rare in the general population turns up much more frequently among men like these, and has led to the suggestion that it

[4] S. Freud, 1888, *Standard Education*, vol. 1, p. 57.

[5] Extracted from *Nature*, Feb. 1, 221, 472, 1969.

may be possible to detect such men early in life, before they turn to violence.'

Now can this argument be supported? Why for example violent crime and not just crime or violence without crime. To what can the possession of an extra chromosome predispose us. Possibly to a greater incidence of structural abnormalities which would make the task of normal adaptation harder and possibly to a greater instability from diminished controlling mechanisms.

The heading of the article is then totally unwarranted but it is a splendid example of a type of psychological explanation so called in which an indisputable observation is blown up to become a chief causal factor in human behaviour. In fact it is not really expanded at all. It is only a relative phenomenon for at the same time the other relevant causal factors are diminished even to the point of insignificance and invisibility in this type of fallacious argument.

Although these examples have been presented to show erroneous explanations and false reasoning, I shall argue that in studying human behaviour no complete answer to the problems we discover can ever be expected to be found. Opposing opinions expressed broadly as those looking outwards from within the human mechanism and those looking into the individual as part of a phylum – creation and design opposed to chance events, teleological versus mechanistic explanations – are likely to be met with no matter how much fresh information is uncovered about our behaviour in years to come. Nevertheless the examples show that a great deal of advance and improvement is possible with our explanations if we use the utmost logical rigour in formulating them from the facts we have. Let me anticipate one of my conclusions that psychological explanation may be presented and accepted as a means of staving off the uncertainties with which we have to live and work in this field. The easy explanation and the apparently definitive one will be wrong just for this reason if for no other.

Let us look then at some of the problem areas that arise when explanations in psychology are attempted. Problems which must be reckoned with but which may not be overcome. First, in the early examples that I quoted fact was entirely subordi-

nated to speculation, to fantasy which was presented as though it was fact. The emerging and the use of scientific method enabled enormous advances to be made. But now this method is all too often reified and so has ceased to be a method. Rather it seems to have replaced the original speculation. There is need for a wider perspective. A scheme to which observations can be referred is needed more than ever because human behaviour and mental function is both the most complex and most extensive subject that we can choose to study. I suggest that there are more variables to be considered at work in human behaviour than in any other field of study. Such a scheme or framework is also needed to set differing methods and observations in their true relations to each other. In other words psychology which was at one time the slave of scholastic philosophy, now seems often to be in need of far more logic and rigour in its conceptual frameworks.

This is, therefore, a relatively straightforward problem to deal with. Perhaps it is complex but with sufficient scruples it should be possible – and obligatory – to check the soundness of the argument that is used in any psychological presentation.

A second area of confusion comes from the rapid expansion in our knowledge of the processes and mechanisms at work in the Cosmos. Because psychological explanation has been cast in the language by which these are currently understood it must change as this knowledge changes. Unfortunately psychological explanation is in fact cast in language which is no longer up to date in other fields. To give an example I still find it perplexing that people will speak of Freud as though he is the last word, whereas the ideas of his so often canvassed are pre-First World War ones. This is not to criticize the ideas but to point out that they must now be reinterpreted or re-examined in the light of modern understanding. His metaphors to describe psychic function were at first hydraulic ones concerning flow and primitive electrical ones about charge and cathexis. But hydraulics does not fit brain function nor even animal movement.

It begins to look as though we understand processes that really are closer to those happening in our brains than could ever have been known before. In an era of the most amazing miniaturization of electrical circuits we are closer to the living

model. Computers have been seized upon as mechanical brains. Without question they do provide analogues which approximate more closely than anything before to some aspects of mental mechanism. But they also show up the chief objection to that psychological approach which is almost entirely mechanistic. They can neither be understood fully nor exist functionally in the absence of the programmes with which they are fed, and the network in which they function. So it is with man. His brain, however much its integrity is necessary, cannot be considered to represent him, a person, in the absence of its external, i.e. personal linkages.

This points to a third area of difficulty in the study of mental function. It is not simply a division of physiology or biology. Its study involves boundary issues that neither of these subjects do. Though our psychic experience is exhibited by bodily function; though it depends on an intact brain, this function is only apparent when so to speak the amplifier or the apparatus is switched on. The function is evoked by, patterned by and directed towards relationships with other human objects. Whatever it may have been like in the earliest human evolutionary states, learning is now the product of human influences and signals. Influences like the experience of being mothered must have remained relatively unchanged down the ages, and most emotional signals likewise. Those that impinge from culture, civilization and technology must steadily change as they change.

Psychology as a subject cannot therefore avoid fluid frontiers with other disciplines. However mechanistic its practitioners may wish to be, it must relate to the study of communication, of systems, of behaviour, of games theory, of anthropology and social organization because these all deal with the human environment which is the context of any individual mental function.

If it were a matter of studying signals only the problems would be easy. Computers work as they do because they are stupid. They get on with the task that they are bidden to do. We cannot because our memory stores are not factual ones only. They consist of experience stores loaded with all the emotional components of those experiences as well as memories of the

events themselves. Indeed they are described with justice as internal objects – internal representations of people. We are sometimes distracted by them and by such things as fear, boredom and conflicting interests from achieving a goal. As I've just said our experience is inseparable from relationships in which emotional bonds and repulsions develop and operate from the first. These in turn modulate all the ensuing communications and transactions. This increases one problem in psychology. The observer is usually a 'participant observer'. In observing a transaction he is or becomes involved in it. When he can observe unknown and unseen it is not so, but whenever he participates in a human encounter it is not just influenced by his presence but his own contributions to it are also likely to be influenced by it. The emotional significances projected upon him by the observed easily influence his own responses unless he particularly works to minimize them. Our personal responses to situations, to any research or investigation carried out on us, add a complexity that makes psychology more than a refined biology.

The difficulties that I have mentioned so far might almost be described as technical ones which can be minimized by greater sophistication. Those that follow are in a sense metaphysical ones.

A fourth area of difficulty comes from the fact that there are at least two approaches to the subject. I will call them those of the researcher and the treater. My natural one is from or in the direction of treatment. It is of more than passing interest. This division is inevitable, in the nature of things, and not always the result of sloppy thinking on the part of either party in misunderstandings. It is hard to keep distinct or to tolerate the interaction of the roles appropriate to a scientific approach to things and to a therapeutic one of responding to personal needs. Human communication is used to convey factual statements about events. It is used to elicit aid or gratification but it is also used to control or to discomfit. Also there is a jump, a discontinuity between an objective attempt to understand or study a human problem and the personal experiencing of that problem by the sufferer.

This happens to form a particular part of psycho-analytic

practice and theory which it may be useful to develop for a minute. The effect of a drug depends on two factors. There is its specific effect on enzyme or other physiological systems. But whenever a drug is ingested something else is likely to be ingested also, a dose of expectation, something magical or the reverse, a dose of an enthusiastic doctor or a trusted one, a quack, whoever it may be. When you ask patients in my field to describe their reactions to taking a drug you will often hear that its beneficial effect is felt long before it could be absorbed or else that they take one seeking an immediate relief or lift when so far as you know it is not supposed to have any such effect. In either case the effect of the drug is on the internal processes of the patient, physical, mental or both.

There is a psychotherapeutic parallel with this dual function of a drug in using the relationship between patient and doctor, not simply in its formal aspects but also in what we call the transference relationship. This implies bringing out into the open what may be the hitherto unexpressed and often quite unconscious hopes and fears, ways in which infantile attitudes, irrational attitudes crop up within the present relationship to distort it. Past events and fears are seen to be still operating in the present. Using this means brings into the centre of the field not only the professional process going on but the use the patient is able to make of it, his here and now experience of it. His history and past experiences can be reinterpreted in terms of his immediate encounter with the therapist. All his affective responses however seemingly irrational are then seen as immediate, living and appropriate ones to another context so that learning and change can take place from this insight.

Possibly you have difficulty in discerning a difference between these two things, a passive response to a process and an active internal process which uses help. But it is inescapable as I see it in working with persons. Let me put it (by means of a quotation) in another form.

> '. . . Talking about infants is not the same thing as talking about primitive stages in the emotional development of persons as seen in the study of patients . . . For me, there is no description of an infant that leaves out the behaviour of the

person caring for the infant: or in an object relationship, the behaviour of the object . . . At the beginning, as I see it, the infant's relationship to an object is so intimately bound up with the presentation of the object to the infant that the two cannot be separated. In terms of object relationships the infant is entirely dependent on the way each bit of the world is brought to the infant, so that one can say that the world is presented to the infant either in such a way that the object seems to be created by the instinctual drive in the infant or else in such a way that there is no link between the creative element in the infant and the existence of the external object . . . the mother adapts . . . so that the creative element in the infant is met and the infant begins to perceive that there is something good external to the self. . .'[6]

I have changed the order and omitted bits in that quotation from Winnicott. The psychotherapeutic process that I was outlining parallels his suggestion that the world is presented to the infant in such a way that it seems to be created by it. I know that this is speculation and anathema to one kind of thinking but I suggest that it touches on perhaps the most basic of all issues in human perception and learning.

I cannot touch on, even if I were able to, an issue of prime importance which escapes psychological study, the processes at work in human creativity. But the degree to which this matter is either dismissed or enhanced is a valuable yardstick in assessing the value of a psychological theory.

To recapitulate my argument in this section I am suggesting that in most fields of psychological enquiry the thing which we believe we study and the experiencing which we do study are always, and always will be, different. This alone will lead to conflicting statements from those who look at this arena from opposite ends. Though there is a difference in purpose and hence in attitude, emphasis and interpretation between the researcher and the treater even that which the treater believes he is doing still remains external to the subject until it is admitted.

[6] D. W. Winnicott, *On Envy*, (Case Conference), 1959, 5, 178.

A fifth area of problem really continues the last but in another guise. There must always be a mind body problem. In terms of cerebral organization consciousness is not understood, neither in damage, nor in intoxication nor even in sleep. It appears in the experience of 'I' ness, which is in the very etymology of conscious and conscience. This seems to be the first human experience and the basic one. In this connexion perhaps I should say healthy experience because I believe it can be invaded very early on and changed leading to what we call disease. In psychoanalysis, and elsewhere since, the word ego has a wide currency. It has become such a technical and everyday term that one almost imagines that an ego can be seen, described, even dissected out. But ego still means 'I' and 'I' ness experienced is individual and cannot be observed but only inadequately described.

The initial experience seems to be the disclosure, self-disclosure, at the impingement of a stimulus or signal, that 'I' am experiencing it.

> 'My suggestion is that each of us becomes aware of what is distinctively himself when surveying a set of "distinct perceptions" there breaks in on him a self-awareness, a self-affirmation of such a kind that he recognizes the distinct perception to be 'his'; becomes aware at the same time of what it is to be himself, the same self; becomes aware of his personal identity. It is in such a disclosure, as and when it occurs around "objects", that we have the empirical basis for all distinctive first-person utterances.'[7]

Here presumably is one of the frontiers that psychology has with philosophy and religion because questions seem to be raised about our relative position in the Cosmos of the same order as when we speak of Infinity or of God. There is a mystery in being an individual, a person, an I.

But this self-disclosure has another importance as I understand it. If it has validity, it passes from being a philosophical concept to belong to the microstructure of mental function. It

[7] I. T. Ramsey, *Biology and Personality*, 1965, Blackwell, Oxford, p. 183.

is of the same order as an amino acid molecule is in the formation of a much more complex protein chain. It is the continuous but infinitesimally brief knitting together of micro units of this sort that go to make up an emotional response. It seems not unreasonable to expect that something more than experimental method is necessary to investigate this. Just as in the physics of atomic particles the mathematical or logical prediction of particles precedes their discovery so it seems to me that at some future date similar predictions will be appropriate in our subject.

The mind body problem can be illustrated further by using the computer simile again. They are machines which respond to instructions, which are encoded into and the responses decoded from an impulse language which they can use. They are designed to have certain capacities like speed of operation, volume and storage. This may be the brain but the mind is surely the network of which the computer is part. Put in another way, the result of the task or programme fed into the machine has an existence as a transient pattern, but in a sense it only survives if it leads to some further action or is translated into some permanent form. Mind must include the input and output aspects of what I have called the network. It cannot only involve the mechanism. I get the impression that much psychological research is rather like putting extremely delicate probes into the machine and discovering evidences of electrical activity. At other times it seems like disconnecting certain parts to try to trace how the assembly is linked up. It is not that this is illegitimate, it is only that such manoeuvres do little towards identifying the task on which the mechanism is working at the time. That can only be sought from the wider context. A jumble of electrical impulse sound can only be discovered to be a coded series of messages when some concept of message carrying is applied to the noise.

Although I would be wrong to label all psychological research in this way, it does remain true that a great deal of psychiatric research is of this order of crudeness and so far contains little approaching the sophistication of research into say the chemistry of intracellular processes. Just as these processes are programmed with remarkable precision to produce what is

required so human behaviour at its roots is I believe likely to show a comparable type of organization. In the case of the cell it is called upon via its nucleus to respond to demands to meet environmental change or dangers. In the case of the personality its messengers, catalysts, enzymes, and the like are metaphorically speaking in the human relationships and bonds, especially their internal representations, which are inseparable from human life.

So the last area that I shall discuss centres on problems of individuality. I refer to the nature and relevance of the individual experience.

It is customary in a scientific psychology to measure functions, to use rating scales, to test the significance of factors and variants, to try to build up a picture of a particular personality type or of a particular disease syndrome. In therapy many patients wish to talk in the third person about what a person ought to do; to think of themselves as a diagnostic category; to require from the therapist a what-the-book-says answer, to receive from him a particular technique. For that matter many doctors are only too willing to work in this third person way. But in therapy the essence of it lies in the individual's personal experience and use of the therapeutic encounter. There is always a conflict between but not of necessity total disagreement with the objective, scientific approach and that.

Another practice in psychiatry is to take a history of the patient's illness. It is so obviously important to allow a patient to express his own account of his need that it is almost unbelievable that it is so ignored in other branches of medicine even when one thinks how much time it takes. It is no less important to relate events in time to see which ones may have had causal links with ensuing ones. Much psychodynamic speculation goes on based on supposed facts which can easily be shown to be chronologically false. But even when these things have been cleared aside it is still necessary to ask the question 'How do causal events so-called act as causes?' I can look at only one aspect now. An event which is only historical does not have causal significance emotionally. Take for example this historical statement 'I moved from London to Leeds in 1956'. Clearly my life thereafter was lived in Leeds and not in London. My im-

mediate environment, contacts, experience, etc., were different, a discontinuity was created with the old. But that event was of my own relatively conflict-free choosing. In other words it was sufficient unto itself at the time. Hence it carried with it the minimum unresolved into the future. Now if I had been compelled to move against my will or if I had left a lover or any other compelling sort of attachment behind, hankerings after London would have been carried on into the future as a continuous contrary if not actually subversive influence on my subsequent feelings and conduct. By contrast sometimes the future hazards of an event, as in this one, are openly foretold. A young man who was persuaded by his family after a lot of difficulty to add his consent to theirs for the performance of a *post mortem* on his father, said to them 'Alright I give my consent but if you allow it to be done I will never forgive you'. That of course was neither consent nor yet a workable contract for the family to act on as it stood. The consequences were clear for them if they had tried to proceed.

The clinically significant facts, the causal facts then are not the real historical events themselves. Their personal meaning and experience is, and this will vary for each participant in an event according to his own internal state at the time. Nevertheless the event, be it chance or not, occasions an experience which would not otherwise have occurred.

There is always then a complication to the simplest of human enquiries. Chance events have more than their specific effect, they are associated with one influenced by the state of the person to whom they happen at the time they happen. To add to the confusion not all events which look like chance ones are, but are sometimes quite subtly determined. These statements – only other ones about personal uniqueness – make for such complexity that most psychological and psychiatric study has to create artificial conditions or so to limit the observed factors that what is being observed and described bears little relation to normal human experience. One hazard of this is that any deductions drawn from such work are already dangerously skewed in the direction of reductionistic arguments. I believe that healthy human life results from the exclusion of an infinite number of distinct perceptions and associations of thought

leaving a relatively narrow zone but one rich enough for all the things required for focused attention and action. A need therefore in effective psychological research is to attempt to produce some conformity in direction between the necessary exclusions of the research and the exclusions of the focusing processes at work to produce the behaviour studied.

There is a paradox here. A statistical view has no validity for personal experience and such experience cannot be generalized. It is important to know that a particular operative procedure has a one per cent success rate because it must encourage the search for either another form of treatment or for a better operation.* But if you happen to need the procedure yourself because death is inevitable if you don't, then a one in a 100 chance may discourage but probably will not deter you. You may be the one or one of the ninety-nine. You can never know in advance which.

In the reverse direction one case anecdotes can do no more than provide hunches about the personal significance of events in future cases.

Only some forms of experimental procedure are truly observable. The effect of a drug on some of my functions may be observed without my knowledge if I am linked up to a monitoring system, though even then one cannot ignore the emotional significance of being so linked. My cortical electrical activity can be monitored as is done in so much interesting research on sleep and dreaming. Hence research into those objective things gets undue preponderance. My personal experience cannot by definition be observed. I can attempt to describe it. (Trying to describe 'red' is an example of what I mean.) It may be possible to infer some of it from my emotional expressions but communication of the experience depends so much on the identification of the observer's experience with that of the observed's.

Even though all of us are continually responding to signals from persons around us, my experience is that it is harder to get agreement and any kind of validation of the meaning of such

* I have just said 'it must encourage'. *It* must do nothing of the sort. Quite unwittingly but quite appropriately I have used a statement that only a person could make.

signals, be they facial expression, inflexion of voice, mood, significance of the language used or what have you. Complexity is only one of the reasons for this. Because signals are used to stir up affective responses in us, to influence our mood or our probable behaviour, and if in us then also in any observer, it needs a major reorientation to focus on one's own responses as a sensitive receptor. What is thought to be objective is felt to have greater scientific respectability. But the subjective perception is objective enough.

Processes may be observed. Experience can only be experienced and reported but both may be facets of the same thing and are included in the realm of psychology. Hence it is useless for each side in a psychological argument either to accuse the other of wrongheadness or in the reverse direction to expect complete understanding, total identity of views. It is in the nature of the case that as research in psychology is concerned with the personal it is confronted with a mystery. This may take a number of forms or be approached in a number of ways. Examples might be (and these are my choice alone); a body-mind one; one concerning consciousness; one concerned with in-born factors and the nature of instinct, and one concerning the nature and significance of male and female elements at work in us. As human psychology, studied from the angle of development, is pursued backwards towards origins; if the earliest levels of human experience are speculated upon and studied, it seems to be inevitable that a special order or category of things will come up.

I am going to present this in theological language:

> '. . . how often the heretics run some model or other – sometimes a highly sophisticated model – to death, in a passionate desire to understand. Opponents then come forward with other models which show the inadequacy of the first, but they too develop them beyond necessity, and court fresh heresies at the next move. But let us not be made sceptical by such shuttlecock theology. . . . The shuttlecock character of the early history of Christian Doctrine only arises because the ball could never be left to rest in any one empirical court. The struggle to understand God can never come to a satisfactory

> end; the language game can never be completed . . . So theology spends every philosophical model and more . . . like many other people's banking accounts at the present time, it will only show an active healthy condition when its store of empirical models is overdrawn. For it has invisible assets – mystery – of which the models take no account.
> The point above any other I would like to emphasize is, then, the logical complexity of doctrinal assertions. So, how barren and verbal are those doctrinal controversies where each side supposes they are using straightforward homogeneous language, and talking in the material mode; whereas in point of fact they are only each sponsoring different models in order to understand, as best they can, a mystery which is bound to exceed both their attempts. So we sympathize with Augustine's view that doctrine only "fences a mystery"; and we express ourselves doctrinally only because we cannot live and keep silent.'[8]

I hope you will see from my earlier argument that to use theological language is relevant in this psychological context because there is an area in which both are speaking about much the same thing. One can legitimately transpose current psychological models for the ones of which Ramsey speaks. Currently the behaviouristic-psycho-analytic controversy brings out the worst in those foolish enough or unthinking enough to contend.

Unlike the quotations at the beginning of this paper which I criticized in various ways I cannot resist giving one which ought never to have been written. But it is most recent and reveals an attitude which still crops up where prejudice rather than judicious enquiry swamps reason.

> '. . . In short, psychologists have "tried" psychoanalysis and found it wanting. In a book, *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion* which was published in 1961, I adjudged classical Freudian Psychoanalysis therapeutically impotent and conceptually bankrupt. A similar verdict has more recently been reached by Carl Rogers. During the academic year 1962–63 he was at

[8] I. T. Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 1967, London SCM, p. 170-2.

> the Stanford Centre for Advanced Study in the Behavioural Sciences and had a good deal of contact there with several psychiatrists "foreign as well as American".
> From them I learned what I had strongly suspected – that psychoanalysis as a school of thought is dead – but that out of loyalty and other motives, none but the very brave analysts mention this fact as they go on to develop theories and ways of working very remote from, or entirely opposed to, the Freudian views.
> It can of course be objected that Rogers and I are not impartial observers, as each of us has his own "fish to fry" . . .'[9]

That expresses an attitude which is totally inappropriate in our work. No way of looking at the problem of 'persons' if it is serious in intent and has integrity can be either dead or totally bankrupt any more than it could provide a complete picture, let alone an explanation of it. Of course the seriousness and integrity will belong to its proponents. An area of study grows and moves towards others only as some of its workers are aware that their terminology and concepts have become reified and used to 'fence a mystery', and are prepared to tolerate uncertainty generated by questioning the meanings of their labels.

In conclusion I have touched on six areas of problem met with in psychological explanation. The first two, scientific research that is logically unsoundly based and the difficulty of keeping abreast of advances in neighbouring fields are both ones for which considerable success in their solution is possible. The other areas which concern mental function, what we call Mind as opposed to Brain, and issues of being a person and having individual experience, are ones for which I believe no solution in the sense of a last complete word of explanation can ever be found. What is revealed is the continuing need for dialogue and opportunity to re-examine, re-define and re-interpret old issues in the light of current thought. So much so-called explanation has been designed to diminish anxiety by closing a gap and denying the existence of mystery. Much still is. We can at least try to diminish it.

[9] From O. H. Mowrer, *International Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1969, p. 537.