

# A Novel Approach to Psychology

## Introduction

It has been said that psychology began as the study of the soul; it lost its soul when it began the study of the mind; and it lost its mind when it began the study of behavior. The fundamental question that must be answered in order to recover psychology's mind and soul is this: What is the nature of man? Is he merely an animal, and nothing more, or is he not just the highest form of animal life but in some ways transcendent of animal life? Or is he merely a chemical cog in an impersonal cosmic machine?

Psychology lost its soul when it failed to define *soul* as anything more than *mind*. It lost its mind when behavior was deemed suitably empirical for psychology to be considered a science. That is, psychology lost its soul when it decided to treat man like an animal and it lost its mind when it decided to treat man like a machine. Put yet another way, psychology lost its soul when it sought a naturalistic explanation for man, and it lost its mind when it sought a mechanistic explanation for man. If we are to view man as being more than a mere machine, we must show that he is not mechanically or chemically determined. If we are to view man as being somehow above the animals, we must affirm that he is a free moral agent.

## Why this is important

The philosophical argument concerning determinism has gone on for centuries. Arguments for free moral agency as well as those that posit determinism, are varied and ingenious. B.F. Skinner was the most well known and outspoken exponent of psychological determinism (in which man is essentially a machine). We will not trace any of these arguments here; we merely note that just as the concept of *morality* demands human free agency, so does the notion of *psychology*. Neither mechanisms nor animals display free moral agency, and neither has any need of psychology.

So, if the question of importance is whether man is only an animal or if he is somehow "higher than the animals," our answer will either affirm or deny the very possibility of psychology. If we answer this question by claiming that man is nothing more than an animal, we'd better be very careful indeed. For animals will be animals. And we must remember how repulsive the "law of the jungle" is to the civilized human psyche. This disgust with the "law of the jungle" itself supports the notion that man is not *merely* an animal, despite his growing inclination toward, and toleration of, animalistic behavior.

## Nature of Man

If we look closely at Man, we may distinguish him from animals in a number of ways. He has opposable thumbs, is an economic entity, is a "spiritual" being (whatever that means) is a tool user, or tool maker and seeks and uses leisure time. He has personality and at least the appearance

of self-control.

But is he truly free in a sense that animals are not? Does he truly have the power of choice? Certainly there exist psychological predispositions that we may neither deny nor avoid, such as man's innate self-centeredness in pursuing his own best interests. And there are physical or chemical forces that may be thought of as "causes." Hormones, genetic inheritance and "sexual preference" are examples of such behavior-modifying forces. But in the end, there is always a choice of behavior, a consideration of consequences and an ethical analysis of intent or motives. No animal, so far as we know, has this sense; and no human, save the severely damaged, can escape it. Either man's behavior is determined hormonal, by the animal "is," or volitionally by either the hopeful "can be," or the ethical "ought to be." So, despite the fact that we may be genetically predisposed to things such as alcoholism, homosexuality, cheating, or impatience, we are still expected to behave as if we weren't so predisposed. Only a free moral agent can be expected to choose between behavioral options.

But even multiple personalities or demon possession and such problems as obsessive-compulsive disorders seem to argue *against* determinism. For although they demonstrate a true and remarkable inability for self control, they are rare conditions in which the will clearly does not function normally; such phenomena are obvious *anomalies*. Even dementia, senility, and Alzheimer's, during which the purely animal organism pulls away from the power of the personality and the personality begins to decline, would seem to imply a helplessness of the will in the face of the physical laws acting to wrest its animal tendencies from its human control.

This underscores the importance of motive, intent and disposition. We may believe that our theft of another's money was necessary and caused – but we hate the theft anyway and acknowledge its evil character. Or we justify it. Or perhaps we say the act is "meaningless," neutral or indifferent. But surely the mind is not irrevocably made up in advance to steal under any given circumstance, or what would be the point in discussing it? So man at least behaves as if he were morally and psychologically free. He passes judgment (or refrains from doing so) on his own behavior and on the behavior of others.

It should be clear that there can be no meaningful psychology if man is just a deterministically moved bit of matter. "Psychology" cannot be applied to machines since they are not, or have not, souls. There cannot even be an "owner's manual" if man's behavior is determined.

The same is true if man is merely an animal. For although animals *may* have something like souls, their behavior is still very much determined by genetics, hormones and hunger. Even training and conditioned responses cannot unequivocally be said to result from an exercise of reason or volition, as *habit* is the very opposite of *choice*. Psychology can be applied only to free agents. Psychology presupposes a soul and a rational means of making decisions.

## The Ethical Animal in a Mindless Culture

Curiously, there has been, in postmodern times, a widespread tendency on the part of many to *behave* like animals, i.e., irrationally. This is seen, for example, in the senseless crimes that are committed, in phenomena such as "road rage," and multiple body piercings, the increase in the size, gaudiness and apparent lack of reason for tattoos. It is seen in sexual relations without social or

spiritual purpose – merely as something to do because of hormonal urges. It is seen in the animal-like disposal of its young through abortion for those who may find personal responsibility inconvenient. It is seen in the widespread but mindless use of liquor and “recreational drugs” and in “partying” as a way of life for no other reason than the creature instinct for “fun.” It is not that these are altogether new behaviors, but that their exercise now occurs on a scale undreamt of in earlier times. More young people in our culture indulge themselves longer, in a wider variety of ways and with fewer notions of why they are doing so than ever before. “Fun” is viewed by many as an “animal right.” And when they choose to get a job, it is often for the purpose of continuing their “lifestyle.”

Several factors contribute to this syndrome. Perhaps the foremost is life in the aftermath of existentialism, that vast wasteland of a subjective, amoral worldview. This ubiquitous debris from the 20<sup>th</sup> century has so conditioned our psyches to be *nonjudgmental, tolerant*, and hence, *irrational*, that we sometimes have trouble properly defining or even recognizing categories such as right and wrong, true and false.

Another factor that contributes to this syndrome is the widespread belief in evolution which presents an atheistic view of the universe where there is neither *purpose* nor *meaning* and man and animal alike are but chemical cogs in an impersonal universe. We need not argue the truth or falsity of the theory of evolution at this point. We only need to understand that those who have been conditioned to believe it are conditioned to behave like entities in a wholly determined and purely impersonal universe. The only thing that sets such beings apart from the inanimate objects around them is a self awareness characterized mostly by the recognition of their desires and the ability to satisfy them. “I desire, therefore I am.”

Furthermore, in accordance with these desires, there is, today, an overwhelming, if unspoken, hedonism that views entertainment and self-indulgence as the highest good. In fact, our present historical era might more accurately be called the *Age of Self-indulgence* rather than “postmodernism.”

These factors, sadly consonant with the tenants of the Humanist Manifestoes I and II, combined to produce a culture in which a person’s body is for piercing and tattooing, and his tastes, the culinary, the libidinous, and the adventurous, are to be satisfied at every opportunity without doubt or reason. When we are taught that we are mere animals, or that we are answerable to no one, or when our desires become paramount to us, and we rationalize our basest behavior, we indeed are in danger of *becoming* nothing more than animals.

When the only reason required to do something is that we *want* to do it, we behave like animals. When a dog is hungry it eats; it sleeps when tired and has no shame in dumping on a neighbor’s lawn. When their hormones rage, they breed. Dogs apparently have no plans or agendas and no rational mechanism for prescribing behavior. Whenever humans follow their impulses this slavishly, whether they are of a sexual nature, an obsession with food, liquor or anything else, they reduce their behavior to the level of animals. This is *moral* debasement. Cultural debasement usually follows close behind.

Culture parallels psychology. When enough people lose their souls, their culture is soon debased. And when enough people behave like animals, their “culture” declines and finally dissolves. In our society, cultural debasement involves things that will take us too far afield to treat in detail, but it must be seen that when justification for behavior is *unneeded* and the goal of life is

cast in experiential and materialistic terms, society in general and education in particular suffers. In short we become "dumbed down." Pursuit of knowledge that might be counter to animal instincts is frightening and is ridiculed. And pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is considered a waste of time by those who view education as nothing more than a means to a job, and a job as a means to satisfying their every urge.

Susan Jacoby's article "How Dumb Can We Get" (reprinted in *The Week*, volume 8, issue 350 for February 29 of 2008) points out that Americans have suffered for several years now from what she calls anti-elitism, anti-intellectualism and anti-rationalism. Her points are well taken, but we should note that it is not just *intellectual* dumbness with which we are dealing. It is ethical and spiritual dumbness as well. All we need remember is what has gone on in our churches, schools, and families for the last fifty years to see what little influence on today's morality and spirituality traditional views have.

These trends of anti-intelligence, and anti-rationalism as well as anti-traditional ethics and anti-organized religion make it both *permissible* and *easy* for human beings to behave like animals, with no higher cause, calling or authority than those individual desires which can be exercised within socially imposed, but wildly inconsistent, constraints. But by far the more important point, a point missed by many writers such as Susan Jacoby is that these trends are not accidents. These phenomena are not merely the result of an ever widening anti-elitism; they are the *expressed goals* of Secular Humanism. If the universities, the press, the lunatic fringe liberals and the ACLU have their way, much of humanity will soon be nothing more than half dressed apes. Such a "dumbed down" culture neither needs nor can benefit from psychology.

But the very fact that many note with disapproval the dumbing down of our youth to the level of *animals* indicates that man is (or *was*) more than merely animal. Any psychology that seeks to recover its mind and soul requires the full humanity and free moral agency of man, and must nurture man's ability and *willingness* to use his potential to live a higher form of life. That psychology must foster a *rational* lifestyle.

## Human Psychology

We can provide a simple, "blunt instrument" psychology on the basis of man's "inner dialogue." This assumes a basic human nature common enough to verify easily, and uses it as the basis for personal analysis. Put simply, it assumes that man makes choices, many of them bad ones. This fact is the basis for, and is borne out by, the "inner dialogue" psychology.

When a person "talks to himself," or thinks to himself, it is often characterized by his different mental aspects communicating with each other. That is, one's mental processes, when not rational in the strictest sense, consist of the sensuous aspect of our minds or the emotional aspect of our minds communicating with the rational side of our minds or with our conscience. A person's inner dialogue almost never ceases during his waking hours.

A shopper, upon seeing a lamp in the window of a furniture store, might think, "Isn't that a pretty lamp?" This is nothing more than a sensual, acquisitive or *sentimental* part of the psyche asking the *intellectual* aspect to verify or reject its judgment and to inform the *volitional* aspect, or the will, of its conclusion.

Sensuous Aspect: "I think that lamp is pretty. I'd really like to have it so I can enjoy it. What do you think intellect?"

Intellect: "You're right. It has balance, is elegantly designed and contoured and the colors go well with the living room decor. Conscience, do you see any reason why we shouldn't purchase that lamp?"

Conscience: "There certainly would be nothing wrong with purchasing that lamp early next month, but to do so right now would needlessly jeopardize our finances. The kids still need lunch money and we have not yet sent the donation we promised to the Children's Hospital for their fundraiser."

This is what it is to weigh and measure, to adjudicate or to deliberate on any subject whatsoever. A conscientious person may involve several mental aspects of himself in setting forth a conclusion or of a proposed solution after having identified a problem or proposal. This is a simple example, but it illustrates how we grow, change our minds, condition our responses, train our consciences, and learn to behave. It is also the way we deceive ourselves, as when our acquisitive or sensuous nature demands that the intellect provide a justification for what the will has decided to do anyway. The will is the supreme intellectual capacity, and without serious training it listens to whomever it pleases and demands submission from the rest. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche both knew the power of the will.

A person's internal conversation can have myriad "shapes." A few people's inner dialogue may be more a monologue, with only one "voice," but most have several voices contributing to the conversation. Still, it seems likely that only a few people listen to all the voices. Again, most people probably have a single voice, or maybe two, that predominate, or "exercise decisive authority," in any given conversation.

A person may have been trained to "do as you ought to," or to "use your head," or "always do what's in your heart." These behavioral prescriptions correspond loosely to the *ethical* voice, the *logical* voice, and the *sentimental* voice (what many think of as emotion). As a person is trained, these voices are given different roles in advocating behavior. The will, which most often speaks on behalf of the self and its desires, can be made subservient to these other voices.

Some people seem unable to reach a decision based on anything more than personal preference. ("My mind is made up. Don't confuse me with the facts.") A well-balanced person is able to listen to *all* his inner voices and make a rational decision. He may reach a *logical* decision about the purchase of a car, an *ethical* decision about personal problems, a *pragmatic* decision concerning which political candidate to support and a *sentimental* decision about where to vacation.

Failure to heed the right voice may lead to trouble. For example, if a decision about giving to a certain charity is based *solely* on a sentimental response, without serious consideration of concerns raised by the logical voice, much may be squandered. Scams depend on precisely this sentimental response. Personal relationships are rarely based on recommendations of the logical voice, and those that are, often fail early and dismally. Obviously, the trick is to use as many voices as possible, yet recognize the "area of expertise" of each. That is, to make decisions in accordance with the "proper" voice, but timed or modified on the basis of advice of the other voices.

But inconsistency arises not just from listening to the "wrong" voice, but from trying to make *one* voice authoritative in *all* areas. One may despise "emotional" responses and try (unsuccessfully) to stifle his emotional voice. Or he may base his every decision on how he "feels" about the

proposition in question. This seems to be the usual *modus operandi* today. (If it feels good, do it!)

The most subtle, but disastrous, error occurs when self-interest trumps the logical voice, the well-trained sentiments, or the ethical voice. Self interest is vital to survival, but when it overcomes the will in ethical matters, crime, sin or danger results. When the will listens to the voice of self-interest or lust and acts against reason, one's behavior is wrong and offensive to a greater or lesser degree.

Abortion provides a good example of this. Some support "a woman's right to decide" about "her body." Reason reminds us of the fact that it is not just the woman's body about which we should be concerned, but that of the unborn baby as well. Reason insists that the fetus cannot be anything other than human; ethics and the Judeo-Christian tradition condemn the practice of abortion as tantamount to murder at least, and as "playing God" at worst. Yet some still justify abortion on the shaky sentimental ground that the baby might be abused or deformed or . . . whatever. Murdering a baby before it has a chance to be abused, makes perfect sense to those who have "successfully" muted the other voices in their inner conversations. They conclude that because the baby may not be born with the qualities necessary to being healthy and independent, it is all right to kill him.

This not only explains how man is different from the animals, but how he so frequently behaves less admirably than they. It also explains what a therapist is trying to "listen to" when he is seeing a client. A good therapist *attempts* to get a person's "inner dialogue" out in the open where it can be analyzed and discussed. Yet dishonesty on the part of *either* the client or the therapist renders the process useless. The good news is that a person may apply such an analytic method himself without the need of a therapist. Considering the fact that a person's inner dialogue goes on all day long, it's amazing how much there is with which to work, yet how little analysis actually takes place.

While self-analysis has the obvious advantage of eliminating the problems brought to the process by an analyst, the tendency towards self deception is strong and probably universal. The key to the brutal honesty necessary to self appraisal is to overcome one's fear. Indeed, fear is the basic component of self deception as well as a huge behavioral motivator. But if it can be pitilessly overcome, self-analysis can yield some wonderful results, because analysis of the inner dialogue has consequences for all of life.

Most basically it helps a person to know himself. If he is honest he will soon be able to disentangle and identify his various "mental aspects," and to make an objective appraisal of his internal dialogue. He will recognize the logical, the pragmatic, the sensuous, the sentimental, the emotional, the volitional and the ethical, to name a few of the more obvious "voices" in the dialogue. He will also begin to understand which voices generally make his decisions for him. He will notice that his behavior, most often, follows the rational voice, the sentimental voice, or whatever voice dominates his personality.

These discoveries allow one to analyze his responses ethically to see if they are what they ought to be. They allow him to train his conscience, given enough ethical input from other sources. He will also notice that he frequently fails to do the ethically proper thing and can discover why.

All that is required is honesty, a quality that is not as easily come by as one would like. Self-deception is endemic to the human condition and must be handled brutally and shamelessly. But because the inner dialogue is kept to himself, a person may be able at least to see himself as he is.

This is no mean accomplishment. If a person is a thief, a liar or a pervert, a gossip, a bully, or a coward, he only needs to admit it to himself and to God in order to continue his voyage of self-discovery.

#### B. In his relationship to others (projection of his inner workings onto others)

Yet as interesting as this facet of self-discovery can be, it is only part of the journey. For as a person begins to see himself as he is (i.e. as the analysis of his inner dialogue continues without self-deception) he may realize that he has engaged in “projecting” his own psychic characteristics onto others. Examples are myriad. A thief is often suspicious of those who show what he considers to be undue interest in any of his possessions. A complement on his new wrist watch will make him take extra precautions with its safety. For he recognizes himself to be a thief and believes himself to be not very different from others. There is no reason for him *not* to suspect others of the same sins to which he is tempted. In fact, it might surprise him to know that there are some people who are *not* tempted to steal under normal circumstances.

A skilled liar has more difficulty believing what others say, not because he suspects the report might be *exaggerated*, but because he feels it is likely *untrue*. Why would he think truthfulness characterizes anyone else when it does not characterize him? One who feels that people are mean to him, or that they are generally malicious, are often so themselves. The trait of malice might never occur to one as a likely motive for others, who is not characterized by it himself. The gossip frequently believes others are talking about him. The list goes on and on.

What is worse, a person may sometimes *react* to another as if he were just the sort of person he imagined him to be. A person who feels that everyone is “out to get him” may be so convinced of it that he tries to short circuit the “plan.” One who frequently reacts to others defensively, often creates in others the need to react defensively themselves – and they may not like it. The cartoon character, Andy Capp, once explained to a Referee during a soccer game why an opponent was lying on the ground unconscious. “I thought he was going to thump me, so I thumped him back first!” he explained. There are several cases in which real life is more bizarre than this cartoon.

The common practice of projection may eventually teach one that he automatically (and subconsciously?) judges all people on the basis of his own traits, faults and failings. It seems likely that most people believe themselves to be the pattern of human normality, and it is this pattern that is projected onto others.

#### C. In his relationship to God

This may be as far as many people go in their voyage. But for others the voyage is not done. For after a little analysis, some may discover that they are *not* the pattern of human normality. Their recourse lies in ethics and religion, where some sort of an *objective* norm might be found. “If there is a God,” they might reason, “He would either *be* the norm or *set* the norm.”

At this point the journey of self-discovery leads one to the discovery of others, including a standard against which all may be fairly and impartially understood and judged. It is not simply that

a soul may discover itself and understand itself; such a soul is free to discover the rest of reality. When the self is discovered not to be the axis upon which the world turns, great things are possible. Analysis of the inner dialogue shows us that we often project ourselves onto others. Analysis of this fact may convince us that there are better, objective, standards of judgment to be found. Implementing them allows one to fit properly and beneficially into his community.

It should be noted that this principle is *not* universally applicable. Each person must see for himself, or be shown, in what areas of his life it *does* apply. Not *all* people are unaware of *all* their faults, but analysis of the inner dialogue will provide at least a few surprises for most people. Nor do *all* people project *all* their secret traits on *all* other people. But most would be surprised at how different the motives of others are from their perceptions/projections of them.

It seems likely that *no person is completely above any kind of behavior*, given the proper inducement. Every man has his price, his breaking point and his terminal temptation point. There are but three normal responses to guilt or culpability. The first is denial, the second justification or rationalization and third confession and remorse. The first response, denial, is quite common and is typical of human beings who are behaving as if their behavior were determined (“what happened was not wrong. It was neither bad nor good – it just was! It’s not like a choice was involved”) or animals (Hey, we all have these urges; that’s just how we’re made!). They spend no time on analysis because they cannot admit that they have done anything wrong.

The second response, self-justification or rationalization, is also quite common. People wish to be pardoned for their faults, whether they are vices or one-time failures. Self justification or rationalization, begins with the attempt to find or concoct an *excuse* – that is a *compelling reason* why the faulty act was committed. This attempt to parlay a *reason* for a fault into an *excuse* for it, is a prime source of inner dialogue and also a major source of self-deception.

The third response, confession and remorse, signifies a mature recognition of one’s own ethical frailty. It generally accompanies the knowledge gained through the application of an objective standard of judgment, and allows one to recognize his own shortcomings. But it is only here that interpersonal and cultural growth may take place, for it is only here that a person has fully discarded his unexamined notion that he is the pattern of normalcy and without need of change.

## Conclusion

Only if Man is a free moral agent can his behavior, motivations, and, to a degree, the nature of his soul be subject to discovery by psychology. By working backwards from behavior and motives to personality, and not trying to reduce psychology to an exact science, we may gain genuine insights into the nature of the human soul. This may be done by analysis of one’s “inner dialogues,” and the discovery of his projections. Perhaps this method may even be useful in determining why some people *choose* to live as animals.