

*[ For Degree Course of all Universities ]*

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# GUIDE TO PSYCHOLOGY

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## CHAPTER I

### DEFINITION, NATURE, PSYCHOLOGICAL STANDPOINT, SCOPE AND SUBJECT-MATTER, BRANCHES

#### Definition

Psychology may be defined as the science of the mind. It is a systematic study of thought and behaviour, normal and abnormal, social and individual.

Psychology is derived from the Greek word 'Psyche', which means soul or mind and 'logos', which means 'science'. Hence psychology is the 'science' of the mind. The mind is that which thinks, feels and wills. So, psychology becomes the study of thinking, feeling and willing or Cognition, Affection and Conation. Psychology thus becomes the science of mental activities.

The function of the mind is expressed through bodily activities. But the mind cannot be reduced to the body. Mental activities differ from bodily activities—though they influence each other. Different mental processes are mediated through the nervous system. So the definition of psychology should be the study of the embodied mind.

Different psychologists have defined psychology from various aspects. William McDougall regards psychology as, "the positive science of behaviour, of living thing." According to Woodworth psychology is the science of the activities of the individual. J. B. Watson, the behaviorist, defines psychology in terms of behaviour. "Psychology is the science of behaviour." Behaviour is the organised total response to a situation. However, none of these definitions are exhaustive. It is difficult to give a complete definition of psychology. Stout defines psychology as the 'science of mental states and processes.' This definition seems to be exhaustive and can be provisionally accepted. It regards psychology as a positive discipline, taking into account the experimental trends and psycho-physical and quantitative methods of psychological investigation. It does not reduce the subject to a mechanical one, and does not reduce the mind to the consciousness. Besides, this definition looks upon the mind as a whole, rather than an aggregate.

### Different Definitions of Psychology

(1) In ancient times Psychology used to be studied as a branch of philosophy. The philosophers did not lay any stress on the actual experiences in their treatment of psychology. They only indulged in metaphysical discussions with regard to the nature of the self that thinks. According to them, psychology was the '*Science of the soul*'.

In the recent times, objections have been raised against such metaphysical speculation about soul. Speculation about soul is the subject-matter of metaphysics. It is not the subject-matter of psychology. Psychology should study the different expressions through which mind manifests itself. Only that which can be perceived or observed or obtained in experience is dependable. As there is difference of opinion with regard to the nature of soul, it is not advisable to make soul the subject-matter of psychology.

Thus, the metaphysical speculation as to the nature of soul was discarded from psychology so that psychology might be treated as science. To make psychology objective and amenable to experiments like the other sciences, a group of psychologists insisted on banishing the term 'mind' or 'consciousness' from the domain of psychology. McDougall, a noted psychologist, has not found the traditional definitions of psychology acceptable.

(2) According to McDougall, the definition of psychology as the *science of mind* is not acceptable. First, if psychology is a science of mind, then there is no difference between logic and psychology, because logic also discusses mind. Second, there is difference of opinion with regard to the nature of 'mind', and much metaphysical speculation centres round the term 'mind'. To the materialists, mind is only a function of the brain; according to the empiricists, mind is nothing but the total sum of conscious states. There is no mind over and above these isolated conscious states, and to the rationalists, mind is a substance possessing all these conscious states. Hence, when there is no agreement among the philosophers as to the nature of mind, it is better to reject the definition of psychology as the science of mind.

(3) McDougall does not also accept the definition of psychology as the *science of consciousness*. This definition identifies mind with consciousness. But the modern psychologists have shown that consciousness and mind are not co-extensive. There is a level of mind which is known as unconscious, and all our conscious ideas, thoughts, feelings, desires are influenced by the unconscious. Moreover, one can have a direct knowledge of one's own consciousness only. But if psychology is to be a science, it is to deal

not only with individual consciousness, but also with consciousness in general, consciousness of all men and even the mind of lower animals. And to do this, psychology cannot depend on introspection alone; it has to adopt the objective method as well.

(4) After criticising and rejecting the traditional definitions, McDougall proposes to define psychology as *the positive science of the behaviour of living things*. Watson also opposes the employment of introspection and metaphysical discussions in psychology. Watson defines Psychology as the *science of human behaviour*.

These two definitions have an apparent resemblance, but they are really diametrically opposite to each other. McDougall and Watson differ with regard to the meaning of the term 'behaviour'. Human behaviour may be explained in two ways. It may be explained from the *mechanical standpoint* and also from the *purposive standpoint*. Watson has accepted the former standpoint. McDougall has accepted the latter. Watson refuses to admit of the existence of any 'mind' behind the human behaviour. He has explained all human behaviours—simple to complex—mechanically in terms of '*Stimulus-Response*'. His theory has, thus, come to be known as Behaviourism. If the term 'behaviour' is explained in this way, then man becomes reduced to a machine, and there remains nothing to distinguish psychology from physiology.

Hence, the term 'behaviour' should not be explained from the mechanical standpoint. Behaviour should be explained from the purposive standpoint. Every human behaviour is to be explained by the purpose or goal that inspired the behaviour and by the purpose or goal that is sought to be fulfilled by the behaviour. The distinctive feature of McDougall's definition is the admission that the behaviours are the expressions of the mind behind them and that these behaviours are the subject-matter of psychology. This definition has also steered clear of all metaphysical discussion. Behaviour cannot be explained without any reference to mind or consciousness. McDougall's definition has done justice to mind by accepting the purposive standpoint. He has rejected the definitions of psychology as the science of mind or consciousness because these definitions may mislead us into thinking that behaviour is excluded from the discussion of psychology.

(5) Woodworth defines psychology as the *science of the activities of the individual*. He in this definition, has followed a middle path between the extremes. He has used neither the term 'mind' nor the term 'behaviour', and he has used the term 'activities' in its wider

meaning. 'Activity' includes not only the movements of the limbs, but thinking, feeling, emotion and desire also. All the outward manifestations of life and mind fall within the scope of the 'activity of the individual.' By 'individual' he has meant an individual endowed with a mind and body. Thus Woodworth has not rejected mind like the behaviourists. Yet, there are many psychologists who have objected to this definition by pointing out that 'activities' do not connote the comparatively passive states of mind, viz., feelings and emotions.

In conclusion, we may say that it is difficult to give an accurate definition of psychology. All the definitions enumerated above contain some element of truth. We may, by following a majority of modern psychologists, define psychology as the *'positive science of the behaviour of a living being'*. Here, the 'living being' or organism is not independent of environment. Every living being lives in an environment. As the individual acts on the environment, the environment also reacts on the individual. This interaction of the individual and the environment expresses itself in and through the overt behavior of the individual. The term 'behaviour' is also to be understood to include the various movements of the body on the one hand, and thoughts, feelings, emotions, desires, etc. on the other. 'Behaviour' is not mechanical. There is a mind behind it and behaviour is the expression of the working of the mind. It should also be remembered that organic changes are also entwined with behaviour.

#### Nature :

We now come to the nature of psychology. Is psychology a science? If it is, what kind of a science is psychology?

By science we mean a body of knowledge governing a particular department of nature. Every science has a definite subject-matter, a definite method of investigation, system, accuracy and certainty about its results. The two most important methods employed by the science is observation and experiment.

A science may be positive or normative, practical or theoretical, descriptive or explanatory, and biological, physical or mental.

A positive science is one which deals with facts as they are without evaluating them. A normative science evaluates its subject-matter from a norm or standpoint of value. Psychology is a positive science and not a normative science, as it studies mental events as positive facts of experience.

It is a practical and not a theoretical science, for its conclusions are based on observation and experiment. It is both a descriptive and

explanatory science because it not only describes the mental processes but also explains their cause and effect. Finally, psychology is a mental science because it has mind as its subject-matter, although it is closely allied to the biological science, since it does not deal with the mind as abstracted from the body.

Psychologists often raise the question whether psychology is a natural or a cultural science. A natural science is one which deals with a particular department of nature and is governed by the physical laws of causation and uniformity of nature. A cultural science is one which enquires into its subject-matter closely allied by sympathetic laws of understanding. Psychology has been regarded as a natural science by Watson, Wundt and James among others. While those of the understanding school hold that psychology is a cultural science. According to them nature can be explained, but man must be understood as determined by the sense of value and significance. But this view also seems partial. The best explanation will be to take a midway between natural and cultural science, by including the redeeming features of both sciences.

### Psychological Point of View

The subject-matter of psychology is 'mind'. The discussion on mind may, at first, appear to be easy, but when we go deep into the discussion, various complicated problems are found to arise. A definite and wellcut method is necessary if we want to know 'mind' clearly. Hence the question arises—what should be the point of view of psychology?

Formerly, psychology was treated as a branch of philosophy and psychology was discussed from the metaphysical standpoint. But at present, psychology is being treated as a distinct science separate from philosophy. As the standpoint of science is empirical and experimental, the same should be the case with psychology.

Science discusses a particular subject. The aim of science is to give us a general, definite, accurate, and organised knowledge regarding a special subject. The main task of science is to discover and prove the general principle governing the particular and isolated facts. There is no place of unreal, imaginary things in science. If these are the features of a science, then it is evident that in psychology also there is no scope of idle imagination. It must be objective. Psychology must attempt at the establishment of a general law on an accurate observation of mental facts.

It is true that psychology discusses mind ; but one can only know one's own mind. The workings of other person's mind can be inferred by observing his outward behaviour on the

The following features are found in the standpoint of psychology:

The standpoint of psychology is individualistic, while that of natural science is universalistic. Psychology deals with the mental states and processes of an individual. It does not deal 'mind' as such unrelated to any individual. Natural science is interested in the discussion of an object as it appears to everybody, that is, such sciences discuss the nature of an object independent of its relation to an individual mind. But when a psychologist discusses the nature of a mango, he discusses it as it is perceived or tasted by an individual.

The psychological standpoint has been very clearly explained by Stout with an example. Suppose a man is wholly absorbed in watching the waves as they rush in upon the sea-shore and listening to the sound they make. In this total situation, we distinguish three factors: (1) The man who is watching: this factor is the subject. (2) The movement and sound of the waves he is attending; this factor is the Object. (3) The watching and listening which are the activities of the subject in relation to the object. So far as the man is wholly absorbed in attending to the waves, he is not attending to himself or to his own acts of watching and listening. His point of view is 'objective'. But we, who are concerned with the total situation, are taking account of all the three factors. We are not only thinking of the waves, we are also thinking of the subject who is attending, as also of the act of attention. Our point of view is here 'subjective'. This subjective point of view is distinctively characteristic of Psychology. The subjective states and activities cannot be conceived without reference to their objects. A subject is a mind, and a mind exhibits its distinctive character while it thinks of things. Hence, Psychology must refer to objects. It takes account of objects only in their relation to a subject.

The standpoint of psychology is theoretical and inductive. It is theoretical in so far as it describes how the mental states occur. Psychology is not concerned with how the mind should work. It is inductive because it establishes a general law on an observation of particular mental facts.

The mental facts that are analysed in psychology do not come to us as isolated events. They appear to us as a unit, a whole. We analyse this whole experience to get a clear understanding of it, and then we have to re-synthesise these analysed elements. Hence, the standpoint of psychology is analytic-synthetic.

For a clear explanation of a mental fact it is necessary to possess a knowledge of the purpose or goal by which the mental fact has

been created and to which goal the mental fact is driving the mind. So, the standpoint of psychology is purposive.

An individual cannot be isolated from society. His mind develops in the social environment. Hence, the social outlook of psychology cannot be ignored.

### Scope of Psychology

The subject-matter of psychology is mind. So, all the various manifestations of mind and all those cases where mind exists fall within the scope of it. The scope of psychology includes the treatment of the various forms of expressions of mind as related to an individual.

Psychology, on the one hand, deals with one's own mental process as revealed in introspection, and on the other hand, it deals with the indirect knowledge of other's minds obtained through observation of their outward behaviours. Hence, psychology includes both 'subjective psychology' and 'objective psychology'.

Mental processes are related to the nervous system. To get an accurate knowledge of mind, it is essential that one should have the knowledge of the nervous system. Hence, psychology includes the discussion of *physiology*. Psychology will be incomplete without the knowledge of *physiology*.

All the levels of mind are not equally conscious. Mind is something more than consciousness. There is a level of mind which is unconscious. A discussion of mind will, therefore, include a discussion of both conscious and unconscious levels of mind. In the analysis of mental diseases, it has been found that dreams, illusions and hallucinations of the patient help the psychologist to diagnose the mental ills. Thus, it is evident that psychology includes both 'normal' and 'abnormal psychology'. It deals not only with normal minds, but also with abnormal minds.

Our knowledge of the human mind will remain incomplete without the knowledge of the different stages in the process of its development from lower animals. And this will require us to know something of 'Animal psychology', and 'Child psychology'. Hence, Animal psychology, Child psychology etc. come within the scope of psychology.

In conclusion, we may say that the whole world is the scope of psychology. There is nothing in this world unrelated to mind. So, our discussion of mind necessarily relates to other allied things. There are several branches of psychology. As there is an individual mind, so there is what we call 'social mind' in a society. Social Psychology



deals with the different aspects of social mind. On the applied side of psychology we find the Educational Psychology, the Industrial Psychology and the Criminal Psychology. Psychology, today, is not confined to a mere theoretical discussion; it is being applied with useful results in the various field of society.