PSYCHOLOGY AT OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE

IN 1896 Dr. W. H. R. Rivers was appointed to a lectureship in experimental psychology and the physiology of the senses in the University of Cambridge. With this appointment Cambridge set the seal of its approval upon experimental psychology and established the direction which psychology was later to take in the University. It is, however, of interest to note that Professor James Ward had been lecturing on psychology for many years before this and had, indeed, proposed the foundation of a psychological laboratory as early as 1877. His proposal was rejected, so it is said, largely because of the opposition of a mathematician who scented materialism in the project! Be this as it may, Cambridge had to wait till 1913 for a proper psychological laboratory, and till 1931 for the creation of a Chair in Experimental Psychology. To this post the then Director of the Laboratory; Mr. (now Sir Frederic) Bartlett was appointed. For the past twenty-five years the whole of psychological teaching in Cambridge—excluding only its more properly philosophical aspects—has been concentrated in the Department of Experimental Psychology, which is organised—along with anatomy, physiology, biochemistry and related disciplines—under the Faculty Board of Biology "B". Experimental psychology in Cambridge is thus deemed to have earned its place among the human biological sciences.

In 1951 Psychology was transferred from Part II in the Moral Sciences Tripos to Part II in the Natural Sciences Tripos, thus severing its last formal link with philosophy. Most of the undergraduates reading it to-day have already taken Part I in the Natural Sciences Tripos, and therefore come to psychology with some grounding in the basic sciences. A few, however, continue to proceed to Part II in Psychology from Part I in Moral Sciences, and a handful devote to it from other Part I subjects. Although keen ex-Moral Scientists and others are still made welcome, it is felt that psychology nowadays demands the kind of background which a Part I course in the Natural Sciences can alone provide. For this reason our intake is likely to become increasingly restricted to science men. Although valuable recruits to psychology may thereby be lost, this step follows inevitably from the general pattern of development of psychology at Cambridge.

Psychology at Oxford has a different and altogether more tempestuous history. Whereas psychological disputations is no doubt co-eval with the University itself, recognition of the subject as a formal discipline came very much later than at Cambridge. The Wilde Readership in Mental Philosophy, founded in 1898, was the first appointment to be held by an acknowledged psychologist, the late Professor G. F. Stout. Both he and his successors in this office, Dr. William McDougall and Dr. William Brown, may be said to have contributed in their very different ways to the growth of psychological studies in the University. Experimental psychology was, however, specifically excluded by the provisions of the Wilde Readership, and it was not until the foundation of the Institute of Experimental Psychology in 1936 that this aspect of the subject gained a tenacious foothold in Oxford. In fostering a kind of psychology hitherto now to Oxford, Dr. William Stephenson, first as Assistant Director and later as Director of the Institute, played a noteworthy part. Not until 1947, however, did the Final Honours School of Psychology, Philosophy and Physiology come into being, and with it the Professorship of Psychology. The first holder of this post, Dr. George Humphrey, has had the stern and not altogether enviable duty of establishing the School within the traditional framework of the University. He will have many well-wishers on his retirement this year.

The P.P.P. School was envisaged with exceptional care and foresight. On the one hand it had to meet the needs of psychology conceived as a modern scientific discipline—already acknowledged in the work of the Institute; on the other, to ensure that it should not become unduly divorced from philosophical and social studies. Most important of all, it was essential to ensure that those passing through it should have the full benefit of a traditional Oxford education. These varied and in part, perhaps, conflicting demands were reconciled in various ways, of which the chief was the provision that psychology should be taken either with philosophy or with physiology, thus anchoring it securely to the flanks of two well-established—if contrasting—disciplines. It was, however, laid down that all candidates should attend the same courses in psychology itself. Although many people and many faculties were concerned in the plans for the School, it was, above all, the genius of Sir David Ross that brought them to fruition. P.P.P. owes more to his foresight and wise guidance than can easily be told.

Psychology at Oxford is envisaged broadly—much more broadly than at Cambridge. Whereas at Cambridge psychology is accepted—for better or worse—as Science, at Oxford it is viewed as neither Science nor Humanity yet as partaking of the nature of both. Although experimental psychology has a central place in the School, it is stressed that everyday observation, clinical enquiry and —last but not least—plain hard thinking are not less essential than experiment to the development of a firm psychological discipline. In
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Thirdly, Cambridge men have normally but a year in which to cover Psychology in Part II of the Tripos. At Oxford, two years is the rule for P.P.P., although one other subject is taken at the same time. It would seem to many of us that two years spent on two subjects brings better returns than one year spent on one—at least when the subject in question is psychology.

Turning now to Oxford, the first point to note is the unquestionably greater theoretical sophistication of the P.P.P. man. Maybe he does not do his practical work as well as his opposite number in Cambridge, but he knows all about the theories his experiments are designed to test and can discuss them with insight and skill. There is altogether better thinking about psychological theory at Oxford, due, no doubt, to the fact that at present most P.P.P. men read philosophy along with psychology. At the same time, one may detect an occasional temptation to divorce theory from the hard realities of psychological fact.

Secondly, Oxford men display striking individuality in their approach to the subject and most welcome independence of judgement. In Cambridge all but the best of our candidates are prone to write very similar essays. In Oxford, on the other hand, every essay is different, even those written by the weaker men. This would appear to reflect a greater variety in teaching at Oxford and a less formal conception of the subject.

Thirdly, Oxford would appear undeniably weak at the present time on the biological foundations of psychology, despite the fact that one of the School's papers explicitly carries this title. This weakness contrasts forcibly with Cambridge's strength in matters physiological. If the strength of an edifice depends on that of its foundations, Oxford should look to its teaching in physiological and comparative psychology.

The future of psychology as an academic subject is hard to foresee. In some aspects it is tending increasingly to merge with zoology and physiology; in others, to cohere with anthropology and the social sciences. None the less, the idea of psychology as an independent discipline will undoubtedly persist, and the P.P.P. School has a vital part to play in fostering it. Its development will be closely watched, both in Cambridge and elsewhere. The future of psychology in Britain hinges very largely on its vigour and growth.

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SCHOLARSHIP AT A PREMIUM

By Vernon Ford

"I THINK we have a lot to learn in Oxford from Mr. Macmillan", said the old Provost of Broadviews.

I looked at him with some anxiety. He is a roguish old gentleman, with a long white beard and twinkling eye, and is regarded as an amusing conversationalist. I believe that is why his College prolonged him in office, the senior fellows vigorously dissenting. I always view him with some suspicion, for I believe he tries to pull my leg, and indeed a friend retailed to me a remark of his: "I don't mind my young friend Dr. Ford being serious (even in Oxford sooner or later someone must be serious), but need he be so solemn?"

I wanted to let the conversation drop, but of course one of the sycophantic younger fellows egged him on. "What have we to learn from Mr. Macmillan, Provost?" he asked.

"It is this business of premium bonds", the old man went on, taking a sip at his beard. "The principle is of wider application. Think of our scholarship system. Even as it stands it is very much of a lottery. Yes, yes, Gregson, you needn't flash a protest at me with your eyes. My memory is not yet quite extinct. There was that wonder-boy from a London school whom you described as a certain All-Souler, and he couldn't pass Prelims. And you, Rokesby-Dalmellington", and he eyed a solemn young Wykhamist don with an air of infinite amusement, "you landed us with Edeworthy".

"One may occasionally elect in spem", replied Rockes, bridling a bit.

"Quite so, in spem. The word gives the show away. The Provost seemed more amused than ever. "We all elect in spem, and quite right too".

"But what has this to do with premium bonds?" I asked.

"Everything. If premium bonds, why not premium scholarships? It's all very simple. Charge a larger entrance fee for the examination and devote the proceeds to scholarships given by drawing of lots. It would stimulate the boys no end. And the parents wouldn't mind paying the extra: it would just mean cutting down a bit on their other betting, and as things stand now we must assume that all loyal Englishmen gamble. It would mean a larger entry, of course, and more papers to mark, but I have boundless confidence in the zeal of my junior colleagues".

"But would the Ministry of Education give them supplementation?"

"Of course, it would have to. You don't suppose that one of the junior Ministers could risk offending the