

Psychology and the Unity of Knowledge

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Psychology is not an easy subject, for it studies the most complex individuals we know.¹ Psychology is an easy subject, for it studies the kind of individual we all know most about, our *own* kind.

Another paradox: psychology is a theoretically secondary or derivative subject; for what it studies is but a highly peculiar kind of living organism, or more generally, of physical system, and hence any laws it discovers are but special cases of the basic laws studied in physics or biology. Yet psychology is the most fundamental subject; for it studies the only parts of nature which we know in *both* of the two possible ways of knowing, from within as well as from without, or directly as well as indirectly. The rest of nature, since it must be known less directly, can only be conceived by analogy with these parts.

Granted that the human body is much more complex than other physical systems, it is also in an important sense better known. A dog's yelp may indicate to us that the dog is being injured or distressed, but an injury to ourselves may manifest itself both through a tendency to cry out and through direct sensing of pain. At all waking or dreaming times some of the processes going on in our bodies are more or less vividly and distinctly experienced through pains, pleasures, or other forms of bodily sensation. If we know also what is going on outside our skins, this is only because these external goings on have resulted in internal goings on. But the internal goings on, or some of them, we know just because they *are* going on, and for no other physical reason.

The events in question may have to be in the nervous system, some pattern of neural activity; but given this, the experience occurs and we are thus made aware of the occurrence in some degree. There is no other part of nature known in this immediate way. All else is known through this bodily process as intermediary.

Of course, in the above statement I have made use of mediated, as well as immediate, experience. A feeling of pain cannot tell us that we have nervous systems or sense cells. Vision and touch, and various instruments and experiments, must be employed to give us definite physiological knowledge. But, long before physiology, men knew that they had physical—that is, spatially localized—pains and pleasures, and that they could voluntarily and instantly alter some physical processes—their own breathing if nothing else. In such ways an idea of one's body must arise. The body is at least that something which we constantly influence and are influenced by, and which we constantly feel or sense, sometimes as in good shape, sometimes as in bad, sometimes vividly, sometimes faintly, but always in some way and degree. It is our *only constant companion*. So much so, that our bodies may seem to be our very selves. And other things and persons, as we more and more come to realize, are perceived by us only as they modify processes *in* the constant companion.

I am not trying to persuade you that physical nature as such is known only through a more direct knowledge of our own mental states or experiences. My epistemology is not idealistic. On