

Preface

What is changing in psychology?

We think that psychology as a science is—once again—at a crossroads. As it has happened recurrently in the past, it is about to lose its appropriate focus—that of the subjective domain of the human being (the *Psyche*) that is an immediate component in the arena of living—involving all the activities of *being human*. Being ourselves—as human beings—involves happiness and sorrow, hopes and failures, endless searches of “who am I,” and developing sellable tools for helping others as well as destroying them. Both construction and destruction are parts of being human—poetry and cruelty go hand in hand in our lives.

The human *Psyche* is complex, subjective, meaningful, and mysterious. As such, it cannot be reduced to explanations that consider it accounted for by causal mechanisms of lower levels of organization. Thus, the efforts to reduce higher-level psychological functions to physiological or genetic “causes” violate the hierarchical systemic structure of the totality of human beings. That system is organized at multiple levels—all of which are related, yet in ways that are functionally non-causal. Each level is simultaneously participating in the organization of adjacent levels as well as buffering against the potential malfunctions of these levels. The result is a highly resilient open system that depends on the processes of constant relating to the environment. These processes are not in any way “caused” by direct environmental “influences,” nor by “genetic factors.” These processes are basic for all living systems. Higher levels of organization of the psychological phenomena are *related to* physiological and genetic levels—but *not determined* by them.

Nobody doubts that genetic, anatomical, and physiological levels of organization are important in providing the basis for higher psychological functions. But these levels can provide evidence only about the basis of the *Psyche*, not its inherent functioning which is subjective in its phenomena. Yet that subjectivity is organized by basic, objective organizational forms. Psychology studies the *Psyche*—and can only be helped, but not substituted, by knowledge from the lower levels (studied by neurosciences) or organizational levels above the psychological (sociological, political-economic, etc.). The phenomenon of the *Psyche*—human being in all of

its subjectivity—is an organizational level in its own right. The science of psychology deals with the organization of that level.

The problem is that of meta-level aspirations of psychology as a discipline. Psychology, in its social presentation as science, has arrived into the twenty-first century in a state similar to that of hundred years ago. It has been very successful—but mostly in its self-defeating ways of reducing its deeply subjective object—the *Psyche*—to various material (genetic, physiological) or legalistic (social rules, texts) alternate objects. All this happens in its fight to prove it is a science—by external social and commonsense standards of looking “scientific.”

It is precisely the claim that the psychological level of analysis is scientifically legitimate in its own terms that this work is set up to defend. Psychology today is in the process of being taken over by the seeming successes in the neurosciences—with psychological phenomena reduced to physiologically and even genetically proposed explanations. We have seen such efforts before—the 1913 “Behaviorist Manifesto” succeeded in stifling the theoretical progress in psychology for a century. Our effort is to go beyond the detrimental impacts of that turn in the history of psychology. The “Yokohama Manifesto”—to be unveiled at the International Congress of Psychology in Yokohama in July 2016—is a starting point to restore the role of higher psychological functions as the central object of psychological science. The contributions to the present volume constitute the basis for the international and interdisciplinary synthesis that will be further developed in Yokohama. It is an explicit statement against losing the focus of psychology as science to the contemporary fascination with neurosciences or genomics having answers to basic human questions of psychological kind. They cannot—the qualitative nature of the psychological phenomena is different from their objects of investigation.

This volume brings together a representative selection of specialists from around the world who are all working in turning psychology into a science of human ways of being. *Being* refers to the process of existing—through construction of the human world—rather than an ontological state. The volume includes work that is to establish the newly developed area of cultural psychology as the general science of specifically human ways of existence. It is a next step after the “behaviorist turn” that dominated psychology over most of the twentieth century, and like its successor in the form of “cognitivism,” kept psychology successfully away from addressing issues of specifically human ways of relating to their worlds. Such linking takes place through our intentional actions: creation of complex tools for living, entertainment, and work. They construct tools to make other tools. Human beings also invent religious systems, notions of economic rationality, and legal systems. They enter into aesthetic enjoyment of various aspects of life in art, music, and literature. They are capable of inventing national identities that can be summoned to legitimate one’s killing of one’s neighbors, or being killed oneself. The contributions to this volume concentrate on the central goal of demonstrating that *psychology as science needs to start from the phenomena of higher psychological functions* and look at how their lower counterparts are reorganized from above. Such kind of investigation is inevitably interdisciplinary—linking psychology with

anthropology, sociology, history, and developmental biology. Various contributions to this volume are based on the work of Lev Vygotsky, George Herbert Mead, and Henri Bergson, and on traditions of *Ganzheitspsychologie* and Gestalt psychology. The book should be of interest to psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, biologists, anthropologists, and cultural scientists.

The time for bringing the focus in this volume to the public domain is ripe. Psychology in the twenty-first century is no longer centered on any one continent. Neither is it (any more) a prerogative of any single country. Psychology today is developing all over the world, based on many languages and cultural practices. The new integrative field, cultural psychology, paves the road for true international syntheses of ideas in the field. New developments in contemporary biological sciences—such as the epigenetic revolution in genetics—provide potential analogical examples for new psychology for how to deal with hyper-complex and hyper-rapid phenomena. Psychology has accumulated too many data—now it is time to innovate the discipline by developing new theories of a general kind. We, the editors of this volume, coming from Europe, Asia, and the Americas—hope that reading the contributions in this book will trigger new ideas that will bring psychology out of its recurrent question: “Are we a science?” Answering that question does not make any discipline into a science, or deny it that privilege. To be a science means to inquire and invent. Psychology has yet to activate its intellectual creativity. This work—“the Yokohama Manifesto”—is a call for such activation.

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