

# ISAIAH BERLIN ONLINE

## THE STATE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN 1936

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# The State of Psychology in 1936

*Edited by Henry Hardy*

In 1935 All Souls College in Oxford was considering the establishment of a chair in social anthropology (established in 1936 and first held by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown from 1937 to 1946). This stimulated the following memorandum from two fellows, the historian E. L. Woodward and the lawyer and publisher Geoffrey Faber:

## ALL SOULS COLLEGE

We have read with interest the letter signed by Robertson, Coupland and others asking the College to consider the possibility of offering to the University a sum of £600 a year towards the endowment of a chair of social anthropology. We do not underrate the importance of developing the study of anthropology in Oxford; we agree that its development may well receive some support from All Souls. We feel, however, that the question of such support ought not to be considered by itself, but should be discussed in relation to other possibilities, and particularly in connection with the need of new provision in Oxford for psychological studies. In giving, as we ourselves would do, priority of claim to psychological over anthropological studies, we are anxious to make it clear that we do not wish to exclude anthropology, and that we should be well satisfied if the College were able to offer places on its Foundation to a professor in each of these subjects. But if we have to choose between the subjects, we have no doubt that the needs of the University are greater in the field of psychology.

It is known to most members of the College that we have been waiting for some time past to raise the question of endowing or helping to endow, a chair of psychology. We felt last year that the endowment of such a chair really deserved to be considered before the endowment of a readership in statistics. It was with considerable misgivings that we refrained from complicating the issue on that occasion; but we supported the endowment of the readership because we understood that an offer by the College would be of great help in securing for the University a large benefaction for social studies.

THE STATE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN 1936

This benefaction has been received, and we feel now that, at a time when very large provision has been made for social studies, we are justified in asking the College to consider the claims of psychology.

It is unnecessary for us to elaborate upon the urgency of developing the study of psychology at Oxford. This need has been, for several years, officially recognised. The Faculties of *Literae Humaniores*, *Medicine*, and the *Biological Sciences* are in full agreement on the matter, and we believe that they would have the support of other Faculties. It is also unnecessary for us to emphasise the importance of psychological research to the studies of law, history and politics. Modern psychology has perhaps more to offer to these studies than social anthropology, which deals more directly with native races than with civilised society.

We do not ask the College to come to any decision between anthropology and psychology at the next College meeting, but we hope that the question will be referred to the Joint Finance and Research Committee, and that the Warden may be asked to take the opinion of representative members of the Faculties concerned upon the relative urgency of the provision of funds for anthropology and psychology, and to put before the Committee information about the present position of both studies.

20 November 1935

E. L. WOODWARD

G. C. FABER

Isaiah Berlin had been a Fellow of the College since 1932. In 2017 it was discovered that the College archives held two letters from Berlin to the Warden (W. G. S. Adams) – a personal letter dated 14 August 1936 and an official letter dated 15 August – and an accompanying memorandum on the ‘contemporary state’ of psychology.<sup>1</sup> These three documents are reproduced below. There were meetings of a Psychology Subcommittee (including IB) on 11 October and 29 November,<sup>2</sup> but the proposed appointment was not made.<sup>3</sup> Drafts of

<sup>1</sup> C:RF:168; C:RF:179.

<sup>2</sup> C:RF:170–1, 173–4. At the second meeting IB reported that Professor F. C. Bartlett of Cambridge, whom he had recently visited, ‘was unwilling to admit that anybody else in the world was any good’, with the possible, grudging, exception of C. A. Mace.

the second letter and of the memorandum from Berlin's papers were published in *History and Philosophy of Psychology* (HPP) 3 no. 1 (2001), 76–83, since the originals had not at that time surfaced at All Souls, and were presumed lost. It turns out that there were numerous changes made in proof. The footnotes – apart from the one on *Denkpsychologie* – were kindly provided by Elizabeth Valentine. Thanks are due to Norma Aubertin-Potter and Gaye Morgan at All Souls for drawing my attention to the new material, photographing it and securing permission to reproduce much of it in 'Addendum on Psychology in 1936', HPP 19 no. 1 (2018), 43–50. The red page numbers in square brackets refer to the latter publication, which does not include parts of the letter of 14 August, the 'Suggestions and Recommendations' or the appendix: drafts of the latter two items appear in the 2001 publication, but the present online text is the only place where all the final documents are published together and complete.

**[43]** TO THE WARDEN, ALL SOULS COLLEGE

14 August [1936; *manuscript*]

All Souls College

Dear Mr Warden

I am sorry to trouble you in the very middle of your holiday with college business, but Woodward told me that I should send my memorandum off to you as soon as I could. I enclose it, + a covering letter to yourself. I haven't spoken about this to anyone, but I have had some general conversation with Prof. Bartlett in Cambridge, who is apparently very eminent indeed, with Price who is an ideal liaison officer between philosophy and psychology, being a professor of one and a B.Sc. in the other, and with the reader in psychology in Nottingham, J. W. Sprott, who was educated at Cambridge himself, and is an exceedingly able, charming, & highly thought of non-experimental psychologist. I know him well personally & have learnt a good deal from him.

With regard to Straus' book,<sup>4</sup> I have now read about half of it, and can produce my opinion for what it is worth. It is certainly an

<sup>3</sup> It would have been the first election of a psychologist in the College's history.

<sup>4</sup> Presumably Erwin W. Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne: Ein Beitrag zur*

intelligent and interesting and, above all, widely informed and sensible book. His [44] criticisms of Pavlov, the behaviourists, the Gestalt theorists etc. are acute and penetrating but never conclusive and reveal no positive standpoint of his own which could itself be examined in detail. He is essentially not a psychologist, but a polemical critic of the more extravagant presuppositions of certain psychological schools, and in so far as he does this well, he performs a task which philosophers ought to be doing. His real interest is not physiology or psychology, but scientific method in general, and if we, like the Sorbonne, had a chair for the history and philosophy of science he would probably be a very fit occupant of it. He is full of able generalizations, & sometimes really arresting occasional remarks about this or that psychological point, but the whole thing seems to be the commentary of a brilliant outsider reporting on what he finds from an amateur's point of view.

I think professional psychologists who are interested in the foundations of their subject would profit by reading this book and certainly find there ammunition against almost any other school of psychology they wanted to attack. But a collection of critical comments, however useful, & however much credit it does to the author's intelligence, does not make an expert in a highly technical subject. This he seems to me definitely not to be, because he lives entirely off the labours of others, by criticizing, interpreting etc. & is essentially not a specialist, but a critic and a popularizer. I do not, of course, know what he is like as a practising doctor, he is very good I expect; but medicine is not psychology, not even medical psychology, & a combination of it with philosophy which he obviously read rather later in life (he seems only to know those philosophers whose names occur among the early students of physics) does not produce the sort of philosophical psychologist whom, I think, we should go for. Is this very divergent from the views of Franks and Ross? I hope not. The book is at present in my room in Oxford, but as I assume that you are not anxious to have it in Ireland, I'll send it over to the lodgings as soon as I return in October (this is written in a village inn!).

I do think that this is the right moment in which to set about acquiring our man, before Brown's new institute gets too rigidly

THE STATE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN 1936

tied in a particular routine, by which time our nominee may find it rather difficult to acclimatize himself, if indeed he is admitted at all. Also, if we are to look for someone beyond England, in America for instance, I think he might do worse than write to Frankfurter who seems so enormously well informed about everything, & so full of genuine affection & good will to All Souls & Oxford, (& absolutely devoted to Mrs Adams and yourself). I dined with them on the night before their homeward journey, and was very sorry to see {m} them go: his enormous energy, kindness, and integrity of character really must make a vast difference to any body of men he is associated with. I hope all is well in Donegal, that Mrs Adams has fully recovered from her accident, & that the sun is shining. I am off to the Blaskets myself in 10 days time, & really look forward greatly to it.

v. sincerely yours  
Isaiah Berlin

PS Could I perhaps see the proofs of my memorandum if you decide to decide to circulate it? my handwriting is v. trying as I know well.

ALL SOULS COLLEGE

15 August 1936

Dear Mr Warden,

I enclose a memorandum on the contemporary state of psychological studies, which, with your approval, I have drawn up in connection with the recent proposal circulated to the College in the form of a letter signed by Woodward and Faber, recommending the endowment of a Chair of Psychology in Oxford. I am in entire agreement with the general purpose of this proposal, and in particular with the modification which, as I understand, has since been suggested, that a Research Fellowship be created in lieu of a Chair, which, in view of the absence of a general staff of readers, lecturers, or of an organised undergraduate school in this subject, seems eminently reasonable.

I hope the document I have compiled is more or less what was wanted, and may be of assistance to the Research Committee, and possibly the College, in arriving at a decision on this issue. I do not claim that these notes are in any way exhaustive, but they are based

on conversation with experts as well as with such reading as I have done in a subject which is becoming more and more closely connected with my own. I append certain conclusions which seem to me to follow from the evidence I have collected and condensed for the benefit of the committee. If this is the kind of document which in your opinion would be of use if circulated, I should be grateful if you would cause it to be sent to the members of the relevant committees for their consideration.

Yours sincerely,  
I. Berlin

**CONFIDENTIAL.**

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MEMORANDUM ON PSYCHOLOGY.

I N D E X .

A. PHILOSOPHICAL.

B. EXPERIMENTAL.

- (1) HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY:
  - (a) The Study of Intelligence and Habit.
  - (v) Industrial Psychology.
  - (c) Child Psychology and Education.
  - (d) Therapeutic psychology, e.g., psycho-analysis, etc.
2. ANIMAL PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIOURISM:
  - (a) Reflexology and general animal psychology.
  - (b) Gestalt Psychology.
  - (c) Physiological Psychology.
3. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY.
4. PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.
5. PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SENSES:
  - (a) Gestalt Psychology (but cf. 2c.).
  - (b) General Psychology of the Senses, instincts, etc., on the Continent.
  - (c) General Psychology of the senses, instincts, etc., in Great Britain.
  - (d) Appendix on Denkpsychologie.

GENERAL. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

APPENDIX ON THE PRESENT CONDITION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES IN OXFORD.

*This 'index' appears in a galley proof, but was dropped from the final text*

## CONFIDENTIAL

### MEMORANDUM ON PSYCHOLOGY

Modern psychology may be roughly divided into two main categories, which, for our purpose, it is sufficient to denote as (A) philosophical and (B) experimental. In experimental psychology all those types are included, which, although involving the use both of introspection and of inference from it, do at some stage entail the making of experiments under controlled laboratory conditions. I add this to avoid a possible misunderstanding, since the term 'experimental' sometimes denotes, even in the writings of psychologists themselves, a type of enquiry occupied wholly or mainly with the physical or physiological processes connected with mental activity, and not with mental activity itself. To take the two main divisions in order:

#### A. Philosophical Psychology

This type of psychology is also sometimes called analytic or descriptive, and consists in the systematic description, classification, and empirical explanation of the phenomena of human consciousness in so far as they are revealed in normal, self-conscious processes such as memory, introspection, perception etc., and of the examination of their relevance for the problems of epistemology and philosophy in general. This type of psychology, inasmuch as it does not presuppose specialised knowledge either of mathematics or of any branch of physical science, can be, and in fact has been engaged in by many professional philosophers: notably by William James and James Ward; among the most notable living exponents of it are Bergson, Stout and Broad; many among the younger professional psychologists expound it, as for example Mr C. A. Mace in London and Mr J. W. Sprott in Nottingham. It is today considered an important, if too little studied, branch of the general theory of knowledge, and indeed specific endowment for it exists in Oxford in the form of the Wilde Readership in Mental Philosophy, whose holder is precluded by Statute from engaging, at any rate qua Reader, in any kind of experimental activity, it being understood that the founder intended to promote [45] solely such activity, as, in his opinion,



had been pursued by the great John Locke. It is noteworthy that the first and most distinguished Wilde Reader was Professor Stout, who must have been precisely the kind of scholar Wilde had in view. The fact that the present Reader, Dr William Brown, is chiefly interested in medical psychology does not invalidate the original purpose of the endowment, which could serve an extremely useful purpose in a university as rich as Oxford in professional philosophers, and definitely did so during Professor Stout's tenure. The fact that endowment for this subject is already in existence does not, nevertheless, rule it out of further consideration in connection with All Souls. This point I hope to make clear in the appendix to this memorandum.

## **B. Experimental Psychology**

### *1. Human Psychology*

#### *(a)* INTELLIGENCE AND HABIT

The most ambitious type of investigation in this subject is conducted by the so-called London School, founded by Professor Spearman, and by analogous schools attached to the great laboratories of the USA. The main purpose of this kind of research is the discovery and classification of certain permanent factors which are alleged to enter, in different combinations [46] and fashions, into various distinguishable types of intellectual and emotional dispositions. Psychologists of this school claim to have isolated certain such factors, and to have discovered fixed correlations between their occurrence in the complexes into which they combine. The method employed is statistical and mathematical, i.e. the basic formulae, the invariant laws which function as the hypotheses and postulates of the system, are stated in mathematical terms, while the empirical evidence which verifies them is obtained by innumerable 'intelligence tests' (of which there are many different types), the results being stated in statistical terms, which makes them capable of being mathematically treated. The most famous pre-war adherents of such a method are Binet and Simon (the Binet-Simon tests are still in use, I believe); its modern advocates maintain that it has revolutionised their science by placing it on the only genuinely scientific, i.e. mathematical basis, and preach its virtues with passionate enthusiasm. This claim

is, of course, in part or whole rejected by its numerous opponents; some mathematicians, so it is alleged by the opposition, are doubtful about the purely mathematical parts of it. It is impossible for a layman to say, at this stage, whether the new method even appears to have justified itself. It is more relevant to point out that the equipment which it requires, both human and mechanical, tends to be very costly, that it is the work of institutes rather than of single individuals; quantities of 'subjects', e.g. schoolchildren or factory workers, are needed for the purposes of statistical investigation, calculating machines and other apparatus tend at present to be expensive, and unless, therefore, it is the purpose of the College to found, or to help in founding, such an institute, the question of the value of this type of psychology is not of immediate importance; it is very doubtful whether the newly endowed Oxford psychological laboratory<sup>5</sup> (*vide* Appendix) will be able to afford any such research in even a restricted and modest form.

#### (b) INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Closely allied with the above is the type of work carried on in institutes of industrial psychology, such as that founded by C. S. Myers, with its widely ramified studies of industrial fatigue, vocational guidance etc. The practical value of these cannot be doubted, whatever may be thought of the validity of the methods used or of the presuppositions on which they rest. The practical objections which applied in the immediately preceding section apply equally to this type of investigation. Its importance lies predominantly in its influence on national health and education; its theoretical output is not great: a good deal of it, as contained in the

<sup>5</sup> Oxford dragged its feet more than most in relation to the development of psychology. An Institute of Experimental Psychology was finally financed and founded in 1936 – the context for the present report – but initially its activities were restricted to research and postgraduate teaching. William Stephenson was appointed to assist William Brown. With the introduction of an undergraduate school of psychology, philosophy and physiology ('PPP') and the appointment of George Humphrey as the first Professor of Psychology in 1947, Stephenson (miffed) emigrated to the United States.

Journal of the Institute, called *The Human Factor*, consists (a) of physiology, (b) of solemn platitudes.

(c) CHILD PSYCHOLOGY ETC.

A great deal of very valuable and interesting work has been done in the field of child psychology, notably by Piaget and his colleagues in Geneva, and to some extent by Watson in the USA. While all reputable psychologists would naturally be acquainted with their methods and results (e.g. such works as Piaget's *The Child's Conception of Causality*), it may be doubted whether Oxford offers the most fruitful field for a specialist in such a subject. But its importance and relevance to all other branches of the subject is very considerable.

(d) THERAPEUTIC PSYCHOLOGY; PSYCHIATRY

Connected with the above, but by now a separate subject, and, it might be added, a recognised profession, is therapeutic psychology, with its numerous divisions and subdivisions. The most celebrated of these at present are the group of psychoanalytical schools, founded by Freud and his disciples, and by French psychopathologists like Janet, Baudouin etc., whose greatest contributions to their subject are, perhaps, their studies in the fields of suggestion and sympathy, of [47] hypnosis, hysteria, and of various manifestations of emotional life. And of course there are still many scientists who continue along the more traditional and mainly physiological lines of medical psychology or psychiatry. The contributions which these investigators, particularly Freud and Jung, have made directly and indirectly to the science of psychology is very arresting, and, some would claim, epoch-making; and it has profoundly affected workers in many other fields than their own, notably historians, literary and art critics, students of religion and anthropologists, social theorists and creative artists of every kind. There can be no doubt that the scientific standards and objective outlook of the best representatives of these schools are beyond reproach; no serious psychiatrist would today deny the great practical value of such work. But its attention is still mainly occupied with perfecting the actual technique of the treatment of patients, its whole outlook is pre-eminently practical and directly therapeutic, and it therefore

does not seem, in spite of its possibly revolutionary importance, and the zealous advocacy of frequently very ill-equipped popularisers, to have reached that stage of theoretical systematisation, of comparative stability, which is required by any subject before it becomes possible to offer academic instruction in it. As for research unconnected with teaching, I do not see how this can be conducted outside a specially equipped institute of the Viennese type. This is the sole, but, it seems to me, sufficient ground for ruling it out of immediate consideration. Admittedly, if an exceptionally gifted exponent of it were to offer himself for election this might well outweigh the above argument: but, barring that contingency, it seems to me to stand.

## 2. *Animal Psychology and Behaviourism*

### (a) REFLEXOLOGY ETC.

Very remarkable progress has in the course of the present century been made by those purely experimental zoologists and physiologists who have concentrated their attention on the physical behaviour of human and animal organisms under carefully controlled conditions, in particular in response to artificially produced stimuli. Some have attempted to correlate such physical behaviour, whether as direct causes, or as invariably concomitant events, with various real or apparent states of consciousness. Others maintain that this is an unnecessary refinement, that the whole activity of man (and a fortiori of the lower animals) can be exhaustively described and accounted for in terms of physical response to purely physical stimuli. The implications of this kind of position for sociology, anthropology, criminology, or any other social science, are obviously far-reaching. Whatever degree of truth may attach to the theories erected on the basis of this experimental activity, the importance of the empirical results as such both for biology and physiology, and for the therapeutic sciences, is very great. Its most fruitful findings are to be met with in the work on animal psychology and physiology done on the one hand by the school of Pavlov and Bechterev in Russia, on the other by Kohler, Wertheimer and Koffka (but cf. also 5 (a)) in Germany, Revesz in Holland, and possibly Hogben and Zuckerman in England (the

latter is attached to the zoological department in Oxford).<sup>6</sup> This type of research advances simultaneously on two fronts, the animal and the human, which it attempts to fuse into a single general schema. In spite of the brilliant record of this group of scientists, they seem to me to be occupied too exclusively with the physical properties of cerebral or neural processes, to be, that is to say, too definitely physiologists or zoologists with one eye on psychology (which they regard as a branch of biology) rather than psychologists with a physiological training. Their outlook is farther removed from that of philosophy or any humane study than that of any other psychological school mentioned in this catalogue. This is perhaps the reason for [48] the ill-informed, and occasionally extremely silly, statements on philosophical topics for which one or two amongst them, e.g. Dr J. B. Watson, have become deservedly notorious. This should not, of course, blind anyone to the very impressive quality of their work in their special field. But it does indicate that, preoccupied as they are today with the behaviour of the lower animals, naturally enough while their science is in its infancy, they are liable to pay more attention to their rats and tadpoles than to the functioning of the human mind, and tend to be guided by analogies between them more easily than the majority of their colleagues. On this ground, and partly also because the College may not be prepared to provide the necessary facilities, they, too, may have to be eliminated.

(b) GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

Many of the above criticisms do not apply to this important school, which, although many of its members have done impressive work in the field of animal psychology and human physiology, can be more conveniently discussed below under the heading of psychology of the senses (Section B. 5).

<sup>6</sup> Professor (later Sir Hugh) Cairns arranged for Koffka to carry out work on psychological aspects of disorders associated with intracranial tumours and head injuries in the Nuffield Department of Surgery in 1939–40. See R. C. Oldfield, 'Psychology at Oxford 1898–1949, Part II', *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society* 1 (1950) No 10, 382–7, at 384. See also J. Morrell, *Science at Oxford 1914–1939* (Oxford, 1997: Clarendon Press), 85–92.

## (c) PHYSIOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY (GENERAL)

Physiological psychologists exist, as, e.g., Piéron in France, who are more eclectic and less sweeping in their reduction of human thought to a mechanical process than behaviourists, being influenced by the monumental studies in human physiology published by Head and by Sherrington, whose work has shed light far beyond the frontiers of their own subject. But they too may be fitly reserved for section B. 5.

**3. Social Psychology**

The inclusion of this subject under the general heading of experimental psychology is an act of courtesy towards it which it may not be easy to justify, since it is by no means clear that it has any right to be counted among the exact sciences. It is a very new subject, and is only very slowly and uncertainly being systematised. Most of its exponents are still groping in the dark, and if one is asked to so define it as to distinguish it from sociology, political science and psychopathology, I do not know how this is done, since the subject does not as yet appear to have found its feet. An inspection of the works of its foremost English exponent, Professor W. McDougall, will show, I believe, that the subject, despite an impressively scientific facade, is still in its prescientific stage, a semi-coordinated mass of loosely described facts and vague hypotheses, the proper technique for dealing with which has not yet been found. At present it forms a kind of no man's land between a number of older subjects, whose experts occasionally throw out an interesting generalisation or an acute aperçu in its direction, which, for want of a reliable experimental method, cannot be explored or verified. This is no doubt largely due to the fact that the physical and sociological basis of the future science, the physiology and possibly the chemical and biological aspects of such phenomena as mass suggestion, telepathy, extra-sensory perception (*vide* next section below), the exact interplay of acquired and transmitted factors, the influence of environment, food etc., have not been adequately established, and without this such books and essays as continue to be published are necessarily unreliable, and belong to the realm of general culture. In so far as the work of such truly distinguished men as Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, Mannheim and their schools, is neither an account of primitive customs, i.e.

anthropology, nor of the social and political organisation of civilised peoples, i.e. political science and sociology, it is, at best, felicitous guesswork. From time to time gifted and imaginative observers, like Bagehot or Graham Wallas, make acute and original suggestions which entitle them to be regarded as early pioneers of the of the subject; but in the absence of proper criteria for the discovery of the truth, even these justly famous contributions cannot claim a more than amateur status. Like the psychology of religion and the psychology of art, this subject is still chaotic, still the playground for rival ethical and political opinions, still 'subject[49]tive', and cannot therefore be dignified with the title of a separate science. On this ground, unless a man of genius appears, to become its Newton, it would perhaps be premature to subsidise it.

#### **4. Psychical Research**

Ever since this study began to be conducted by psychologists and other scientists of repute, and sufficiently critical methods were introduced, it has made considerable progress. The Society for Psychical Research has certainly collected some very interesting facts or allegations, which throw a great deal of light on such problems as those of telepathy, suggestion, extrasensory perception etc., which are obviously the concern of anyone interested in the relation of matter and mind. Although the subject itself is undoubtedly of the first importance, it has not as yet grown to dimensions which make first-hand acquaintance with the whole field unattainable to specialists in other branches of psychology. This makes it unnecessary to consider the claims of those who profess to be specialists in this province alone.

#### **5. Psychology of the Senses**

This is at present by far the best organised and most steadily cultivated field of psychology proper. It deals with the properties and circumstances of occurrence of the data of the various senses, of memory, of imagination, of introspection, of various emotional and instinctive attitudes, as they are liable to arise under carefully controlled conditions. It lives at the very centre of the subject, since at one end it takes note of the physiological, physical, neural and biochemical structure of the brain, sense organs etc.; at the

other, and this is more distinctive of it than anything else, it strives to describe and analyse minutely the actual conscious subjective experience of the human agent, and in virtue of this becomes closely connected both with the old fashioned Descriptive Psychology (*vide* category A above; this brings it into direct contact with philosophy proper, e.g. the theory of perception and the problems connected with memory), and with certain independent investigators who belong to secs. B (*a*) and B (*c*), who accept the method of these Schools with regard to the study of the evidence, but are sceptical of their bolder hypotheses. The same applies to the undenominational group referred to in section B. 2 (*c*).

The following schools of thought are distinguishable under this head:

(*a*) GESTALT THEORY

The influential and original school of Gestalt-Theorists (*vide* also B. 2 (*a*) and B. 2 (*b*), where it is classified with behaviourism, since its methods and contributions to animal psychology make it essential to include them with other sections of this school): the best-known names are those of Kohler, Koffka, Wertheimer and Lewin, and that of one heretic, Petermann. Originally a predominantly German school, its members have lately emigrated to the USA, where they appear to have met with a sympathetic, and in places enthusiastic, reception in academic circles. Principally concerned with the nature of those pattern-qualities which occur in even the most primitive sense experience, and are, according to them, irreducible components of all conscious experience, they provide experimental evidence to refute the older atomistic and associationist views which dominated psychology, particularly in England, in the nineteenth century, and to some extent still survive in behaviourism and other mechanistic theories. The position of this school is fundamentally sympathetic both to opinions long defended by, e.g., Stout, on largely introspective evidence, and to such evolutionary theories as those of Lloyd Morgan and Henri Bergson, which, in the case at any rate of the former, are themselves defended by experimental evidence. The Gestalt Theory had had a decided influence on the theory of knowledge both in Great Britain and in the USA, and directly affects subjects



which are central in philosophical discussion in, e.g., Oxford and Cambridge at the present day.

**[50]** (b) CONTINENTAL PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SENSES, ETC.

Allied to this school, but more eclectic and less doctrinaire and not wedded to one single principle of explanation in all fields is the work of such men as Ebbinghaus, Gelb<sup>7</sup> or David Katz (*vide* also B. 2 (c)), whose book on colour perception, and analyses of hunger, curiosity etc., both in human beings and in animals, are of outstanding interest and originality. The interest which psychologists of this type take in such problems as the connection of imagery with thought, desire and so on makes them particularly relevant reading for philosophers, a fact recognised by all serious students of the subject.

(c) BRITISH PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SENSES

The same may be said of what is probably the best organised school of psychology in England, that presided over by Professor F. C. Bartlett in Cambridge, whose work on the nature of remembering, on colour and sound perception, etc., is distinguished by its rigorous scientific standards, and the concrete nature of its results. The fact that the Philosophy School at Cambridge includes psychology as one of the alternative subjects required by the curriculum of the Moral Sciences Tripos, by effecting an early alliance between philosophy and psychology, creates a genuine bridge between science and the humanities, and produces men who are at once scientifically trained and capable of grasping the wider implications of the discoveries of their science, being protected by their philosophical past from the tendency to vagueness and romantic exaggeration, and a disconcerting passion for publicly embracing obvious fallacies, old and new, from which some amongst even the most illustrious scientific colleagues are not immune. I was told by competent authorities that some of the ablest young psychologists in this country are to be found at Cambridge or were educated there. If, therefore, the College decided to take a positive step, and to elect a psychologist to a

<sup>7</sup> Adhémar Gelb (1887–1936).

## THE STATE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN 1936

Fellowship, we should, I think, be well advised to seek expert advice in that university before finally committing ourselves.

### SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This completes my brief survey with one unimportant exception.<sup>8</sup> I have made my survey as inclusive as I was able, but for obvious reasons I may well have omitted to mention important details. There is one essential point which I should like to stress before moving on to draw conclusions, and that is that my divisions are necessarily artificial, and distinguish methods and tendencies rather than persons. Reputable psychologists are rarely fanatical adherents of any one view to the total exclusion of all others, nor do they usually confine themselves to a single narrow field of research. Normally they are reasonably eclectic, and are often specialists in two or three regions of the subject, and those not necessarily adjacent ones. This is so in the case of, e.g., Kohler, Katz, Thorndike, Lloyd Morgan, McDougall and others among the best-known psychological investigators; frequently they bring their varied knowledge (in the case of Katz, e.g., of animal psychology and colour perception) to bear together on a single problem with unexpected and interesting results.

It seems to me important, for the purpose of the endowment which the College may determine to create, that this should be so, that our psychologist should not be a self-contained specialist, obsessed by a single idea, or devoted to one over-specific purpose, but that, while being an expert in at least some one field, he should be reasonably well informed about the state of progress of workers in cognate fields, and be capable of establishing relations with those Oxford philosophers who are prepared to take an active interest in psychology.

For desiring this there are several reasons:

<sup>8</sup> This is the German school known as *Denkpsychologie*. I know very little of it beyond some half dozen names connected with it. I have never, I must admit, attempted to read its literature, which seemed to me to be of an appalling obscurity. Nothing has been heard of its members – nor indeed of any German psychologists except the émigrés – since 1933. They have probably, in common with other ‘analytic’ scientists, been liquidated by the new regime, which relieves one of the necessity of considering their claims and merits, at any rate in this memorandum.

(1) Since there is no school of psychology in existence in Oxford, and all that can be provided is a modestly endowed laboratory (*vide* Appendix), whose facilities, it is hoped, would be placed at the disposal of our psychologist by the courtesy of its entirely autonomous authorities, and, at the very best, only one colleague – the assistant director of the laboratory – it is important that he should not be allowed to languish in isolation, in the almost complete absence of fellow workers. On the other hand there is at present a very strongly felt empirical bent noticeable among the younger teachers of philosophy in the University, and one can with absolute confidence predict that they would most warmly welcome the appointment of a psychologist whose subject had a common frontier with their own: even as it is, some amongst them are attempting to establish cooperation with one of the readers in zoology whose sphere embraces animal psychology; but the gap between the two subjects is at present still too wide to make this anything more than a gesture of mutual sympathy and respect. For this reason I should recommend that special attention be paid to Section B. 5 (Psychology of the Senses), in particular to the two last subdivisions, as containing those psychologists who come into the most immediate contact with philosophy and the Social Sciences.

(2) It would accord better with the general policy of All Souls, which is, for the present at any rate, the encouragement of the humane rather than the natural sciences, if a man were chosen who, while possessing adequate knowledge of physiology and general biology, which is undoubtedly indispensable, would naturally belong to the faculties of Literae Humaniores and Social Studies, rather than those of Medicine or Biology. This he would normally do if he belonged to class B. 5 referred to above; moreover this would make it possible for him to interest undergraduates and postgraduate research students drawn from the two philosophical schools in this work; interest in psychology exists already in these two schools, as evidenced by the rapid growth of the university psychological society, but it is at present undernourished.

(3) Psychologists with some previous training in philosophy are, as a rule, better capable both of considering critically the foundations and methods of their own science and of correctly judging about its relations or absence of relations with

circumambient sciences. In a subject on whose fringes so many fanatics, eccentrics, eager but absurdly incompetent dilettanti, and occasionally out and out charlatans are still to be found, this is a rare and valuable virtue.

(4) It seems to me to follow from the available evidence that there are at least two qualifications which any type of psychology must possess before appearing as a candidate for adoption. These are (*a*) that it should be sufficiently 'pure', i.e. that there should exist a systematic body of doctrine capable of forming a theoretical subject of academic instruction and research, and not be chiefly aimed at curing or educating persons in need of therapeutic treatment, i.e. it should not be directly practical and 'applied'; (*b*) that we should be able to afford it financially, i.e. that it should not require facilities which for whatever reason we are not prepared to provide.

If these qualifications are accepted they appear to rule out on the one hand practising psychiatrists, whether of the psychoanalytical or any other school, and on the other hand researchers who require the equipment which only richly endowed institutes, such as exist in the USA for example, can provide. I assume, of course, that we have only our own resources to rely on; if some outside body, e.g. the Rockefeller Trust, were willing to assist, this would naturally alter matters, and widen the scope at present rigorously limited by the exigencies of (*b*).

I hope that I have not given the impression that I wish in any way to underestimate the immense importance of the work done by either of the two kinds of scientists I have indicated, or to ignore the fact that they count tow of the greatest names of our generation in their ranks, Pavlov and Freud, the influence of whose discoveries has affected the future of our intellectual, and consequently material, development to an extent which is incalculable. My objections are founded entirely on local requirements, in particular the needs of Oxford, and the general interests, and means at the disposal of, the College.

(5) Since the Psychology of the Senses is the most adequately explored and scientifically sound region of non-therapeutic psychology, and rigorous standards obtain in it, it is easier to judge a candidate's merit if his reputation has been made in this than in any other field. This is not, of course, in itself a conclusive argument in favour of encouraging this type of research, but must

be taken in conjunction with my other points: its acceptance, so at any rate it seems to me, would facilitate the task of election without sacrificing the interests of the subject.

On these grounds I should like to recommend that, in its examination of possible candidates, the College should pay special attention to those whose interest is in the psychology of the senses, memory and cognition in general, and in particular to those whose qualifications include training in both physiology and philosophy, and who combine specialisation in one field with a broad and informed attitude towards surrounding country (and, if possible, towards remoter regions, e.g. psychoanalytic studies). I should like to add one further point: since philosophy and psychology have both pursued in English speaking countries a course of development which is in certain respects highly individual and independent of the continent, it is advisable that any[one?] likely to come into contact with them in Oxford should have had some previous acquaintance with their history, and should not have to spend too much time and energy in orientation and adaptation. It is therefore to be generally recommended that the candidate (*a*) be fairly young, (*b*) have had some experience of a British or American university. This last qualification ought not, perhaps, to be too much insisted on: it is certainly not a *sine qua non*, but anyone who satisfies it would, on the whole, be more likely to find the intellectual climate of Oxford sympathetic and stimulating to his work; which, in the case of a first occupant of a newly created post, is very important indeed. And, so far as I know, there is no conspicuous lack of men so qualified both here and in the USA, and possibly in the Scandinavian countries, whose scientists are usually in close touch with England and America. It ought not, therefore, to be excessively difficult to discover someone no who would be suitable to election for a research fellowship, if the College decided to offer one.

APPENDIX

ON THE PRESENT STATE OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES IN OXFORD

Two institutions exist at present:

(1) The Wilde Readership referred to above. Dr William Brown, who at present holds it, is a busy London medical practitioner, who is bound to treat it as a part-time occupation. The Reader's emoluments come to no more, I believe, than £300, and under these circumstances it is not surprising that no specialist in the subject which it was founded to promote can be found to hold it: neither Professor McDougall (the second holder) nor Dr Brown are descriptive psychologists, and as the latter has just been re-elected for a period of five years, there is no danger that if we elected someone interested in philosophical psychology there would be any duplication, at any rate for the next five years; at the end of which, if his interests make him eligible, there is no reason why he should not himself apply for it, and if we consider him suitable for re-election, hold it, if appointed, in conjunction with our Fellowship. All this is highly problematic, of course, and perhaps should not be discussed so early in the proceedings, before any decision has been taken. I mention it to avoid the possible objection that by electing a psychologist of this type we should be duplicating an existing office.

(2) As a result of a recent endowment of, I think, £10,000, a psychological laboratory will start to function in October or November, and although under the control of Dr Brown, will in fact be the undisputed realm of the recently appointed assistant, Mr Stevenson, who has for some years worked with Professor Spearman in London. This fact may be regarded as an additional reason against electing a Spearmanite, since the presence of two members of this school may well be regarded as likely to set up an unnecessary monopoly in its favour. Since this endowment will have to cover both the expenses of the laboratory and the salary of the assistant, its equipment is not likely to be over-adequate, nor the salary excessive. It is therefore unlikely that Mr Stevenson will, even if he wishes to do so, be financially in a position to continue here the work which he did under Professor Spearman. This means that he must turn to some less expensive form of research:

this, so far as I can gather from his own statements, is likely to be in the direction of Psychology of the Senses. If therefore we elect someone also interested in this, it is more than probable that the laboratory will be adequate to his needs: Dr Brown and Mr Stevenson must, of course, be induced to allow him the use of their laboratory; but I cannot see why they should see any objection to granting such a request on our part. Doubtless some negotiation will be needed to arrange such cooperation, which, from the point of view of the subject itself, ought to be welcomed by both the parties to the bargain.

I should finally like to say that I very much hope that the College Will give its most serious consideration to the proposal in question, as its acceptance would constitute the long-awaited beginning of serious study of psychology in Oxford. We have recently helped to repair one of the most conspicuous shortcomings of the University by creating a Chair of Anthropology: scientific psychology, which no one would today deny to be a subject of at least equal importance, and one which possesses an older pedigree, and has reached a higher stage of development, has in Oxford been totally neglected in a way in which even anthropology never was. If the College is financially in a position to offer a contribution of £600 per annum – or whatever sum is thought appropriate – towards the increase of knowledge, there is no branch of it which requires support more urgently or would repay it better. By endowing it the College would assist in promoting a new and growing subject, materially and directly aid the studies of two great Oxford Schools, Greats and PPE, and indirectly those of related subjects such as History, Law and Medicine, create a much needed link between the humane and natural sciences, and so fulfil its proper function.

15 August 1936

I. BERLIN

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