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Psychology and Philosophy: A Historical Approach from a Genealogical Perspective

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Abstract

It is self-evident that philosophy constitutes the original intellectual matrix from which the various branches of knowledge and sciences emerged. Psychology, with its broad and specialized fields of inquiry, was historically embedded within philosophical studies. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the relationship between philosophy and psychology through an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together our respective areas of specialization. This work represents an attempt to shed light on the fundamental principles that underpin the formation of an integrated system of knowledge.

Keywords: Philosophy, psychology, behavior, consciousness, love.

Introduction

The title immediately confronts the reader with a range of fragmented concepts and meanings that lead the mind far back into historical eras and moments deeply rooted in the history of humanity. Foremost among these is the moment of reflection and contemplation, when human beings began to question themselves in an attempt to uncover their essence and understand the dynamics that have placed them, and continue to place them, before diverse and often contradictory possibilities. Moreover, the artistic appeal and fascination associated with the particularity of the human psyche make an understanding of philosophical thought and its implications an aspiration for psychologists and researchers in the field. This constitutes one of the references that enrich the connotations of the title. Likewise, the strange psychological phenomena referred to as *parapsychological life* have challenged psychologists and compelled them to seek assistance from fields of knowledge that lie beyond the conventional boundaries of psychology. These considerations are among the indications that establish the purpose of the present research.

The purpose of this study is to clarify the objective, methodological, and integrative relationship that connects these two fields of knowledge, while emphasizing the enduring presence of philosophy and the longstanding connection between questions addressed by the psychological sciences and philosophical inquiry.

We begin our intellectual journey with the early stages of human thought, when psychological inquiry constituted an integral part of the intellectual systems of human societies, that is, of the broader general system of knowledge. Particular attention will be given to the religious system, which was characterized by a dualistic vision that regarded the soul as a source of evil in the world, portraying it as an instrument of Satan and as that which commands wrongdoing. According to this perspective, attaining success in worldly life could only be achieved through overcoming and subduing the self. As human awareness of the self subsequently developed, this perspective evolved toward the idea of disciplining and refining it, particularly as human beings found themselves confronted with contradictions arising from an awareness marked by ambiguity and shaped by numerous judgments and individual and collective experiences that had failed to manage the self effectively. Limited perception and narrow vision were consequently regarded as deficiencies in the human being, with the self serving as their underlying reference. The wisdom accumulated through humanity's experience further reinforces this perspective.

In this context, we will draw upon an influential Eastern model of universal significance, namely Taoist philosophy, which developed through the thought of Laozi and Zhuangzi. The rationale for invoking this tradition lies in its capacity to serve as evidence of the striking intersection between religious and philosophical inquiry concerning the self. This intersection represents one of the major features and distinctive characteristics of Eastern thought. As a matter of historical fairness, we begin with the philosopher Laozi, following the principle of chronological precedence, since his intellectual presence preceded that of Confucius. Historians have suggested that Laozi was approximately fifty years older than Confucius. The following passage states:

“Knowing the eternal through deep reflection... and failing to know it leads to calamities. By knowing the eternal, the mind becomes open. With an open mind, the heart becomes open. When the heart is open, one can act in a kingly manner. When one is kingly, one becomes divine. When one is divine, one walks hand in hand with the Tao.” (Lao Tzu, 1995, p. 73)

Lao Tzu brings together the clarity of the mind, freed from the constraints of bodily and psychological desire, with the notion of divinity. Some Western scholars, through their limited understanding of what they perceived as the paganism of Eastern traditions, interpreted this divinity as a form of transcendence and elevation. A similar idea is expressed in Islamic thought through the concept of nearness to God. This perspective concerns the relationship between the self and the changing material world, or what scholars have defined as the world of generation and corruption.

Psychological phenomena as addressed in religious studies, or what may broadly be described as religious thought, reflect what can be regarded as the natural basis or origin of deviation. The instincts that constitute this nature are viewed as the source of evil and as a reference point for various forms of psychological tension. In addressing psychological issues, the religious imagination often attributed them to transcendent and independent causes beyond the psychological phenomenon itself. Among such conditions were epilepsy, spirit possession, and similar manifestations of abnormal behavior.

Religious engagement with these phenomena, particularly as embodied in the lives of the prophets, was not necessarily based on superstition or on a transcendent dismissal of observable phenomena. Rather, the self and psychological events were connected to the process of moral refinement and to the influence exerted by both the individual and the surrounding environment on human personality. One of the distinctive features of the Mosaic mission was its orientation toward refuting and resisting the prevailing intellectual deviations within the human imagination. This was particularly evident in the widespread practice of magic, the commercialization of it, and the belief in its effectiveness. The story of Moses, peace be upon him, and his refutation of the magicians’ argument, followed by their acknowledgment of the power and greatness of the God of Moses, constituted a message to those who held such beliefs and a decisive challenge to the prevailing imagination of that period.

Psychological phenomena, whether considered as symptoms or as an essential dimension of human experience, are therefore not entirely independent of human will, nor are they devoid of care and guidance. This event also suggests the presence of a tendency toward deviation within human nature as a secondary rather than a primary disposition—that is, what Aristotle refers to as the “second nature.”

Christianity likewise proceeded along a path of reform, independently of broader Christian religious thought. The prevalence of organic, psychological, and psychosomatic illnesses during the time of Jesus, peace be upon him, gave his mission a distinctive character, particularly through the therapeutic methods he employed in treating the sick. The tendency to portray these methods exclusively as miraculous aspects of prophetic healing, however, appears to conflict with certain historical accounts found in the Gospels. These accounts indicate that the apostles whom Jesus sent to preach were also entrusted with the task of healing. Thus, the treatment of physical and psychological illnesses was not limited to Jesus alone; he also taught his disciples methods of healing.

As for the role of the self in such pathological conditions, it requires only a modest examination of the intellectual heritage of Christian thought. The story of Mary Magdalene and the manner in which Jesus, peace be upon him, dealt with her can be understood as reflecting, or implicitly embodying, a prophetic approach to such psychological conditions. At the same time, religious thought remained, in certain contexts, rigid and claimed a transcendent authority over matters of spiritual and moral judgment. Those regarded as sinners were consequently given little place within the world of the Church or the mosque, even though these institutions had, as Thomas More is said to have remarked, become a “sheepfold” for members of the clergy.

The psychological theory in Islam is more precise and comprehensive, encompassing a wide range of areas of inquiry. The three states or manifestations of the self—*al-nafs al-ammārah* (the commanding self), *al-nafs al-muṭma’innah* (the tranquil self), and *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* (the self-reproaching self)—reveal an objective understanding of the structure of the human psyche, which is shaped by the interaction of multiple forces. Education also occupies a central position in the Islamic perspective, as it presents a coherent approach to the psychological and emotional development of children.

The argument advanced here is not motivated by an emotional attachment to Islamic theory. Rather, the Islamic intellectual tradition did not reduce the self to a single dimension, as in the negative and inferior conception attributed to it in earlier religious thought. For the sake of intellectual fairness, it should also be acknowledged that the fundamental

psychological reality is shared across religions, while the differences that emerged were largely shaped by religious adherents and, more specifically, by religious thinkers and scholars.

Among the Islamic principles that may contribute to addressing a number of scientific questions within the field of psychology is a statement attributed to Imam Ali, may God honor his countenance, concerning human nature and its position in relation to other forms of nature. It states:

“God endowed the angels with reason without desire, the beasts with desire without reason, and human beings with both. Whoever allows reason to overcome desire is better than the angels, while whoever allows desire to overcome reason is worse than the beasts.” (Al-Bustani, 1992, p. 15)

The dual structure of human nature should not be understood as a static condition underlying human behavior; rather, it functions as a dynamic force that drives the various forms of human activity. The will operates between these two forces—the force of desire and the force of reason—particularly at moments of moral testing. The complexity of the human situation brings into play higher psychological, or more precisely spiritual, forces that reflect the higher potentialities embedded within the human personality. Within religious philosophy, the human being is conceived as created with a purpose oriented toward immortality rather than annihilation. This characteristic should not be regarded as a deficiency in human nature; rather, it establishes and reinforces the aspiration for a happy life, without which such an aspiration would lose its foundation. The deviation of traditional theories from the path of truth can ultimately be attributed to the ideological conditioning of their underlying perspectives.

The Self in Philosophy

The distinction between philosophy and psychology is one of the intellectual traditions that emerged from modern technological developments and from the dominance of ideologies in their various ethnic, economic, and political forms. Such distinctions, according to this perspective, represent an innovation introduced by the West and subsequently imitated by the East. The ontological separation between the two fields of knowledge led some thinkers to conceive of them as distant and even paradoxical disciplines. Originally, however, the issue was primarily concerned with the search for an appropriate methodology capable of transcending the subjectivity embedded in philosophical approaches to understanding problems and advancing psychological inquiry. This development was accompanied by an increasing tendency to focus on superficial aspects and to emphasize points of difference in constructing comparative frameworks. Accordingly, the supposed conflict between philosophy and science is little more than an artificially constructed controversy—an intellectual deviation that Arab thought has, in part, embraced while remaining caught in a state of intellectual stagnation.

The enduring intersection between philosophy and psychology lies fundamentally in their shared object of inquiry. The absence of complete agreement concerning the meaning and nature of the self has itself been a major source of divergence among psychological schools, and this divergence has contributed to the development and consolidation of psychology as a discipline. The philosophical presence within the history of psychology is therefore clear and undeniable, particularly when viewed against the broader philosophical intellectual system, which has traditionally encompassed questions concerning the universe in both its material and human dimensions. The Socratic maxim, “Know yourself,” is sufficient to demonstrate the centrality of the self within philosophical inquiry without requiring extensive elaboration. Philosophers’ interest in the self was not exclusively theoretical or epistemological; it also had a practical dimension. The search for the ideal human personality represented a distinctly social aspiration, while philosophy served to theorize and document this aspiration. Ethics, as a branch of philosophy, is likewise grounded in psychological foundations, since the investigation of desire and the attempt to understand its nature were among the issues that occupied the attention of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

The relationship between philosophy and the human sciences is also evident in their shared subject matter. The human sciences initially developed within a context of uncertainty regarding their own identity and methodological foundations, particularly when attempting to define the domain referred to as the spirit or thought. This intellectual heritage has subsequently become an important resource that the human sciences have been called upon to incorporate in a clear, systematic, and scientific manner.

Psychological sciences in general, and psychology in particular, have undertaken the study of this broad field referred to above, particularly because philosophy had left much of it unexplored. Consequently, those engaged in the human sciences came to regard themselves as responsible for addressing this domain. They maintain that the traditional philosophical task, which originated with Greek thought, should be reconsidered and pursued today, but this time through the tools and methods of the human sciences. However, it seems difficult to regard this approach as providing a complete account of the problem, since such an interpretation remains, in an obvious sense, grounded in a particular philosophical conception, namely **positivism (Positivism)**.

It is difficult for a researcher examining the history of psychological studies to assert or claim that a particular thinker or people had priority in the development of inquiry into this field. It is certain that all human communities have engaged in reflection and contemplation on the influence of the self on the behavioral life of both individuals and groups. The divine revelations, in their various forms, were likewise directed toward correcting psychological deviations whose manifestations

were reflected in abnormal behavior. The first crime in human history was rooted in the self, and this influence continues to manifest itself to the present day and beyond.

Socrates, the Greek philosopher and one of the major figures in the development of philosophical thought and systems, is regarded as one of the earliest thinkers to contribute to the formulation of psychological inquiry. His emphasis on ethical questions led him to examine the nature of the self in greater depth, viewing it as the hidden world contained within the greater world. The self thus became a central object of inquiry. It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between the Socratic and Platonic theories of the self because of the close intellectual relationship between the two philosophers. As Al-Ahwani puts it: "Socrates continued to struggle in his search for the nature of the self, but he did not reach his goal... Plato therefore continued along the same path" (Al-Ahwani, 1991, p. 17).

The Socratic **maieutic method**, also known as the method of generative irony, reveals an approach that remains present in psychological inquiry. This can be observed in the subjective schools of psychology and, to some extent, even in scientific approaches, which cannot entirely dispense with the subjective dimension in which the subject under investigation serves as the link between the individual's own experience and the researcher's reasoning. For Socrates, genuine knowledge ultimately remains the personal possession of the individual. Regardless of how carefully hypotheses are formulated to represent a psychological situation, their validity remains dependent on the individual's responses. The relative nature of scientific findings in the psychological sciences provides further evidence of this. One of the distinctive features of the Socratic approach to psychology is its association of ethics with psychological behavior, an aspect that contemporary studies have not always been able to adequately apprehend. Religious perspectives in general, and Islamic thought in particular, emphasize the role of behavior and moral habits in shaping psychological responses, and vice versa. Moreover, the persistence and predominance of subjective understanding as an indispensable tool for dealing with psychological cases within major schools of psychology can itself be regarded as an expression of the philosophical dimension of psychological inquiry.

The Greek philosopher Plato, meanwhile, established through his philosophical conception of the self a number of methodological foundations that later became relevant to psychological inquiry. His tripartite conception of the psyche—comprising the appetitive, spirited, and rational dimensions—opened new perspectives for reconsidering the traditional judgments that had accumulated around the self throughout cultural history and had often portrayed it in a dark and pessimistic manner. Plato demonstrated that the psyche encompasses different, and at times conflicting, dimensions, thereby contributing to the conceptual foundations of specialization within the psychological sciences. The appetitive dimension, insofar as it is associated with the organic aspect of human life, subsequently became relevant to physiological psychology. The rational dimension of psychological life, meanwhile, became central to several psychological schools, including Gestalt psychology and cognitive psychology. The same applies to educational psychology and its related fields.

The Platonic philosophical interpretation of the psyche, however, was not always clearly and systematically articulated. As stated in the source: "Plato's position on the question of the psyche was not clear in the early dialogues. He agreed with Socrates on the existence and immortality of the psyche, but his explanations did not go beyond the level of commonly held conceptions." Plato nevertheless regarded the psyche as more important than the body and considered its cultivation essential for the development of virtue. In his view, the psyche contains latent forms of knowledge that do not result from subsequent acquisition. Absolute truths had already been experienced by the psyche in the higher world; consequently, knowledge in its fullest sense is nothing other than recollection.

As for the "First Teacher," Aristotle, his investigations into the psyche and the psychological field constitute an important reference for any researcher. His work *On the Soul*, translated into Arabic by Hunayn ibn Ishaq, addresses numerous questions from their fundamental principles. In my view, Aristotle's understanding of the psyche was formulated in a relatively mature and comprehensive manner from the outset. Subsequent interpretations of Aristotelian theory, however, were often employed, as is common among researchers, in the service of particular intellectual and ideological doctrines. The relative and open character that accompanied Aristotelian inquiry reflects the scientific spirit possessed by this exceptional thinker. In this context, he states: "It is clear that if there is a complete definition of the soul, it will be of the kind that defines form..." (Aristotle, 1962, p. 15).

According to Aristotle, therefore, every interpretation of the psyche remains, to some extent, a hypothesis, leaving the field of inquiry continually open to further investigation. His research in *On the Soul* provided important foundations for subsequent studies of sensation and perception. This, in turn, demonstrates the enduring influence of philosophical thought on psychological inquiry.

The influence of the Platonic theory of recollection can likewise be observed in both psychological and philosophical inquiry. Its significance requires little detailed explanation, insofar as the psyche is understood as containing the various keys to human behavior, whether these remain obscure or become explicit. Parapsychological questions within psychology may also find a fertile conceptual space in Plato's theory of the psyche. The presence of the Platonic theory of recollection within psychoanalytic thought is particularly evident in certain mechanisms of psychological treatment employed by the pioneers of the field. Hypnosis, as an early methodological approach preceding the development of free association, was

based on the assumption that underlying memories play a role in activating psychological energy within the patient. Discovering or accessing these memories through analysis therefore became a central objective of psychological treatment.

If we consider perception as a psychological phenomenon, the philosophical dimension becomes equally evident and deeply embedded within its study. The analysis of perception involves questions concerning both its concept and its nature, and inquiry into the nature of a phenomenon is fundamentally a philosophical undertaking. The various philosophical systems have consequently offered their own interpretations and perspectives on this issue. Moreover, the analysis of perception into conceptions and judgments—that is, into conceptual representations and mental judgments that establish relationships between these representations in formal structures, whether affirmative or negative—finds a particularly fertile field in formal logic, where such distinctions contribute to the development of concepts and theoretical formulations.

Among the psychological approaches that clearly reflect philosophical analysis is the theory of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715–1780). In his work, Condillac sought to investigate the elementary psychological phenomenon from which more complex phenomena are formed through processes of combination. He argued that the primary phenomenon underlying knowledge is sensation and the mental representation through which it is expressed (Brihiya, 1998, p. 38).

As for the Gestalt school, it mobilized its psychological and logical arguments to refute these philosophical propositions. Yet it too ultimately fell into the traps of philosophy. The concept of insight, understood as a holistic apprehension of the relationships within the perceptual field, as observed in Köhler's experiment with the chimpanzee "Sultan," cannot be characterized as anything other than an instance of intuition. From a philosophical perspective, the intuitive approach provides a more precise account of the nature of intuition than that offered by the scientific approaches of psychologists. The point here is simply to draw attention to the enduring philosophical presence within psychological research.

Spinoza's attempt to understand or explain emotional phenomena may likewise be considered relevant in this regard. A superficial reading of the text might suggest that the Dutch philosopher was laying the foundations for, and paving the way toward, a scientific approach to emotional phenomena through philosophy. His criticism of the Cartesian interpretation further reveals the scientific orientation underlying Spinoza's project. He states:

"Indeed, Descartes ... sought, as I understand it, to explain human emotions by their first causes and, at the same time, to indicate the means by which the mind could attain complete mastery over them." (Spinoza, n.d., p. 60)

In his *Ethics*, Spinoza opens up precisely those scientific horizons that experimental psychologists later claimed to derive from the empirical sciences, while denying philosophy any foundational role in their development. The following passage supports this interpretation:

"The proper method for knowing the nature of things, whatever they may be, should likewise be one and unchanging, always grounded in the laws of nature and its universal principles. Thus, emotions such as hatred, anger, and envy are, in themselves, like all other individual things, the products of one and the same necessity of nature and are characterized by one and the same natural property" (Spinoza, n.d., p. 163).

The new schools of psychology that emerged during the first three decades of the twentieth century may likewise be characterized as intellectual revolutions directed against one or another of the assumptions derived directly from the legacy of empirical philosophy.

Psychoanalysis and Philosophy

Drawing on the psychoanalytic school as a model for illustrating the relationship between philosophy and psychological studies is well justified. The debates surrounding the evaluation of this school can be understood as stemming from the epistemological revolution and the ethical upheaval it introduced. Its emancipatory orientation away from philosophy rests on a number of assumptions articulated by Freud in the following passage:

"Philosophy does not oppose science; rather, it behaves as though it were itself a science and may occasionally borrow its methods and procedures. Yet it departs from and differs from science insofar as it is concerned with illusions and claims to offer a new, complete, and flawless account of the universe. Such a claim can be shown to be false with every new advance in knowledge. From a methodological standpoint, philosophy therefore deviates from the proper path by overestimating the epistemic value of its logical operations and by accepting the existence of other sources of knowledge, such as intuition, for example." (Freud, 1999, p. 97)

The psychoanalytic school provides a broad and fertile body of evidence and arguments concerning the intersection between philosophy and psychological research. The concept of the symbol, for instance, constitutes a central concern and objective among the school's major thinkers. The attribution of neurotic and pathological psychological symptoms to the realm of the unconscious, or to what Freud terms the id, which operates according to the principle of the libido, represents one of the fundamental assumptions and necessary hypotheses of psychoanalysis.

The effect is understood as resulting necessarily from a cause. Just as neurological and organic symptoms may arise from dysfunction within the organic structure, whether at the level of its composition or its functioning, pathological psychological phenomena may likewise result from a set of causes corresponding to the nature of the event itself—that is, causes that are essentially psychological. However, examining the nature of a psychological phenomenon inevitably directs

attention to diverse factors, foremost among them the social dimension with its ethnic and cultural components. Psychological causation therefore does not assume a single form, whether purely psychological or social, although, in terms of its relative weight, it may be predominantly social in nature.

Accordingly, the scope of psychoanalysis has progressively expanded beyond the fragmented specificity characteristic of scientific inquiry. Through this broader and more comprehensive orientation, psychoanalysis comes to approach the domain of philosophy.

Neurotic symptoms are therefore nothing more than expressions of an unmet need or a disturbance in psychological equilibrium. The symbol, both as a datum and as a conceptual problem, is fundamentally a philosophical issue. The relationship between the signifier and the signified, whether understood in terms of intrinsic or conventional association, assists the psychoanalyst in deciphering the meanings embedded in the behavioral or verbal symbols employed by the patient. The problem of interpreting symbolic structures became a central reference point for the scholars of the school. Consequently, the psychoanalyst found it necessary to explore the domain of language and the world of linguistic interpretation, since language provides an entry point for unraveling the ambiguity surrounding psychological symptoms. The researcher must also possess a precise understanding of the conceptions underlying major religious beliefs, because grasping the meanings of symbols enables the causes of symptoms to be identified, while understanding their causes constitutes a pathway toward psychological treatment.

The school also made use of myth as a means of representation and explanation, as exemplified by the Greek myth of Oedipus, which contributed to an epistemic revolution in scientific and moral consciousness. The notion of transcendence through which human beings had traditionally been conceptualized was thus subjected to critical reconsideration: Who is this human being, and what worlds does he conceal within himself? The myth of Oedipus and his suffering should be understood merely as a representation of the imagination of the ancient Greek individual rather than as a depiction of an actual lived reality. Nevertheless, the implicit references and meanings contained within the myth provided Freud with an intellectual framework for substantiating his theory.

If we turn to Freud's conception of the ego in his work *The Ego and the Id*, we encounter Sigmund Freud's attempt to formulate a new philosophical conception of the mind. Whereas the Kantian analysis of the mind proceeded from abstract assumptions and purely formal principles, distinguishing between theoretical reason and practical reason, Freud sought to examine the mind from new psychological and organic perspectives. In doing so, he illuminated a dimension of the mind that had remained resistant to understanding and interpretation by earlier philosophers. His theory of the unconscious can therefore be regarded as one of the major epistemological upheavals in the history of human thought.

For Freud, the mind, or the ego, corresponds to the conscious and perceptive dimension that monitors voluntary activity and regulates it in accordance with the demands of reality. Yet consciousness reflects only the surface of mental life. It is also important to note that Freud sought to challenge the Cartesian or rationalist thesis according to which consciousness constitutes awareness, or an identical and coextensive form of reason, accompanying all psychological events. Freud states:

"Consciousness is the surface of the mental apparatus... But what of those internal processes which, in a somewhat vague and imprecise manner, we collectively call thought processes? They are substitute processes for mental energy that take place somewhere within the apparatus as this energy moves toward action." (Najati, 1982)

The psychological analysis of the micropsychological phenomena underlying the constitution of the mind does not extend beyond the scope of the analytical and fragmentary approach found in philosophy. A reading of David Hume's epistemological philosophy reveals a notable affinity between his approach and Freudian analysis. Hume was particularly known for his analysis of perception, which he sought to deconstruct into its principal psychological and cognitive structures. A similar methodological mechanism can be observed in Freud's approach to the interpretation of psychological events.

A philosophical dimension can likewise be identified in many of Freud's psychological ideas, particularly those subsumed under the concept of metapsychology. This becomes evident when considering the distinctive nature of the psychological event: it is fundamentally individual, conscious, and enduring. Freudian theory elevated psychological findings to the level of philosophical generalization, extending them into universal propositions concerning human phenomena as a whole. This is particularly apparent in Freud's application of psychoanalytic interpretation to broader social systems, including religion and civilization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we may agree with the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, who states:

"There are as many psychologies as there are philosophies, because psychology and philosophy are inseparably connected. Both constitute systems of opinion concerned with an object that cannot be completely tested and therefore cannot be understood through a purely empirical method. Accordingly, both fields of study stimulate thought, resulting in the formation of opinions whose number becomes so great that considerable effort is required to comprehend them all. Neither field can therefore dispense with the other, since each provides the other with its implicit foundational assumptions, which are often hidden." (Jung, 2003, p. 291)

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