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Had the social construction of psychological science been different in the 1950's and 1960's there would have been no need for a separate discipline of Descriptive Psychology. However, in fact there was such a need and in fact Descriptive Psychology was evolved. The present essay is in part a summary recounting of how it came about and in part an account of the general character and systematic development of Descriptive Psychology.

Although there were significant precursors dating back to 1961, Descriptive Psychology took on essentially its present form in 1964-1965. A six-month period at that time saw the initial formulations of the concepts of Person and Behavior (Persons) and of the system of reality concepts (Outline of Behavior Description; see also "What Actually Happens") and also the introduction of a number of essential concepts and distinctions such as "significance", "social practice", "theory of" vs. "theory about", "part description" and "partial description", and subject matter vs. locus of study, as well as the introduction of paradigms, schemas, and formulas for representation and the Pragmatic Paradigm for research.

Substantively, there were very few direct historical influences on the Descriptive formulations. Anscombe's book, Intention, is the most obviously important of these, since three of the parameters of the Descriptive concept of intentional action

reflect her neo-Aristotelian formulation; further, her example of the man standing outside the farmhouse later suggested a technical implementation for the concept of "significance". Wisdom's work on metaphysics provided a springboard (but no help) for a systematization of the basic reality concepts (i.e., object, process, event, state of affairs, relationship). The derived concept of the real world (Ossorio, 1971/1978) reflects the stimulus of Wittgenstein's evocative opening lines in the Tractatus Logicophilosophicus ("The world is everything that is the case. The world divides into facts, not things...."), though it draws nothing from his own technical development of that idea. Strawson's (1957) notion that a person is an individual for whom both psychlogical and material object predicates are essentially and irreducibly applicable is part of the background for (1) a behavior formula with both psychological and (by the usual standards) materialistic elements and (2) a formulation of persons in which bodily characteristics such as hair color, genetic makeup, etc. are one class of person characteristics. Automata theory provided the model for a completely formal definition of Persons, independent of material embodiment. The work of analytic philosophers at the time provided some models of conceptual formulation at a working level. Finally, the formal systems of Carnap, together with his maxim that questions of meaning precede questions of truth, were part of the intellectual history of Descriptive Psychology.

However, by far the most important precondition for Descriptive Psychology was a deep and pervasive dissatisfaction with the then current psychological theories and psychological 'science', and with the philosophical views for which they stood proxy. There was much to be dissatisfied with then, as there still is now.

Subjectively, points of dissatisfaction form a fluid and endless parade. It is a matter of essence and entirety and not merely fine points or particular issues. However, a sample of more or less discrete areas of dissatisfaction is presented below as "A budget of problems". The point of these is not to draw up a full bill of particulars or to prove a case (even these brief sketches run the risk of tedium), but rather to indicate the kinds of issues which might be involved and to suggest the degree of commitment to a viable alternative which a concern for such issues might engender.

A Budget of Problems

1. Psychological theories portray persons in ways which are not merely limited, but highly distorting as well.

There are two examples from outside psychology which are helpful in seeing what is involved and how it comes about. The first is the following joke, and the second is baseball.

Consider a man sitting up in a bed in a hospital room, with his friend sitting in a chair beside the bed. The man in the bed is cursing and ranting on about the physician who performed some minor surgery on him the day before. At one point he says, "That son of a bitch! He just thinks of me as a piece of meat! All he did was get me in here, cut me up, put me on extra fluids, and here I am like a slab of beef on the hook!" His friend intervenes and says, "Yes, of course. I can see where you would get that impression, and I can see how you would be mad as hell about that. But," he continues, "be of good cheer. I can assure you with absolute confidence that he really does see you as a human being. I happen to know that even as he was cutting you up he was planning to send you a bill for his services."

Behind the humor, there is an interesting point. In one sense, the patient in the bed was correct about the surgeon. That is, in order to perform the surgery, as a technical procedure, the surgeon needed to know only physiological facts about the patient. To be sure, if we believe the friend, the surgeon didn't make the

mistake of thinking that that kind of fact was the only kind there was, for after all, you don't send bills to organisms. Still, for the task at hand, he needed only that kind of fact; for that task, those facts were sufficient.

This notion, that for a given task certain sorts of fact are sufficient, leads directly to the second heuristic example, i.e., baseball. Consider that game and consider the kind of talk that is part of playing the game. Utterances such as "batter up", "strike three", "safe", and "play ball" come readily to mind because they are formally essential to the game. Other utterances such as "Watch the man at first", "Let him have a knuckler around the knees", "I've got it!", etc. come to mind as commonplace though not essential. What we can say is that for the task at hand, i.e., playing baseball, only baseball facts and only baseball talk are needed.

Similarly, every form of human activity carries with it a corresponding set of distinctions, hence facts, and ways of talking which codify some of these facts and distinctions. Indeed, to engage in the activity <u>is</u> to act on some of these distinctions. Because it has a general methodological significance, the term "baseball talk" is used in Descriptive Psychology as a technical term, to designate in a content-free way the talk that is involved in a particular human activity as such.

The concept of "baseball talk" carries two reminders. The first is that any system of facts is limited in its relevance and

the corresponding talk is limited in its point. The second is that the talk that is part of carrying on a given activity is in general wholly inadequate to describe that activity (try this with baseball; with science) or to place that activity within the broader framework of human activities.

With this preamble, one way of understanding both what the limitations of traditional psychological theories are and why these limitations are present is to understand these theories as baseball talk. Essentially all (perhaps literally all) these theories originated in the context of a given form of human activity, e.g. running a conditioning laboratory, treating medical or psychological pathology, running a measurement laboratory, and so on.

In the case of personality theories or general behavior theories, the baseball talk and the corresponding ways of thinking and acting have been universalized, and this is a major source of distortion. The result is analogous to the case of a fanatic baseball player who in his purchase of a loaf of bread appraises the grocery clerk as someone who is insufficiently alert to do a good job at second base and is, in effect, relegated to a permanent non-playing position; similarly, he understands the phenomenon of driving home from the grocery store as essentially a case of advancing to the next base.

The learning theorist who appraises the grocery clerk as an organism which has been reinforced for sloppy behavior, the

psychodynamic therapist who appraises the grocery clerk as an organism which has acquired elaborate, derivative ways of discharging instinctual energy, and the Existentialist who regards the purchase and sale of a loaf of bread as absurd may derive more utility from their descriptions than the fanatic baseball player does. But quite possibly they do not. In any case, their views of the grocery clerk are no less grotesque than are those of a fanatic baseball player or a fanatic surgeon.

Few except the proponents of these theories would argue that human life (literally or in effect) is baseball or that it is conditioning or psychotherapy or surgery or measurement or research. To cast it in any of these perfectly respectable forms is a violent distortion. Thus, it was clear twenty and thirty years ago that we needed something better than traditional psychological theories. We needed more adequate ways of representing people and what they do; we needed more effective ways of increasing our understanding of them; and we needed better ways of treating them. We still do.

Since these issues do not reflect or stem from a specific form of activity a baseball talk solution is not to be expected (or suspected). As we shall see, the resolution of these issues takes a form which is fundamentally different from a psychological theory.

2. Psychological theory and method are clearly almost entirely non-empirical, yet no satisfactory account of this fact has been available.

Part of the folklore of psychology (and we could just as easily call it superstition) is that the psychological enterprise is essentially one hundred percent empirical. So thoroughly ingrained is this "given" that decades of protest by a small number of psychologists and by psychologically knowledgeable outsiders have succeeded in making non-empirical studies at most marginally (very marginally) acceptable in Establishment journals and not quite totally lacking in respectability among academic psychologists.

But one does not have to look very long or very minutely at psychology as it is practiced to discover that huge portions of it are completely a priori. For example, all of the methodology of psychological research is a priori. Theories or models of experimental design and of statistical analysis and of measurement and of operationalization are a priori. 'Substantive' general theories such as psychoanalytic theories, learning theories, and Existential theories are a priori in that they are not falsifiable. (Is there any observation whatever that would tell us that in fact behavior is not a way of discharging instinctual energy or that in fact behavior is not the inevitable outcome of a learning history and present circumstances or that a person is in fact not a being-in-the-world, etc.? Of course there is not.)

It was no less clear in the 50's and 60's that the major part of psychology is non-empirical and that that thought is unthinkable for most psychologists. Three decades have seen only a slight increase in the inclination of psychologists to recognize that there is something amiss in having such a glaring discrepancy between myth and reality in their scientific efforts. So long as the foundational considerations for a psychological science are allowed to rest, almost entirely by default, on the currently existing set of historical "givens", psychology will continue to be a social arena "where ignorant armies clash by night."

3. Both psychological theories of methodology and psychological theories of behavior are inadequate to provide a rationale for clinical practice.

Another part of the folklore of psychology (and here I would not hesitate to call it rank superstition) is that clinical judgment is essentially a matter of inference. Over and over again, we hear routine references to "clinical inference". Over and over again, we encounter analyses that say explicitly or in effect, "These judgments that clinicians make are obviously inferential, and they have to be inferred from what can actually be seen, i.e., movements, postures, etc."

Accepting such a thesis leaves the clinician in an untenable position. He faces the problem that then none of his 'inferences'

are justified, and all of the existing evidence supports the inductive conclusion that such 'inferences' are never justified.

For, to make an inference requires an appeal to a general premise of the form "Whenever x, then y" (e.g., whenever a person clenches his jaw he is angry) and a specific premise of the form "Here is a case of x" (e.g., this person clenched his jaw); given these one can infer that here is a case of y (e.g., he is angry). However, there are no true premises of the first sort known to psychologists or anyone else, and certainly not to the clinicians who are supposed to be making the inferences. Any of the premises of the "whenever x then y" form which have been suggested for clinicians or attributed to them have been shown to be false or can easily be shown to be false. Thus, inferences of the sort that clinicians are popularly supposed to make may be formally correct inferences but they represent defective and irrational thinking.

It is sometimes suggested that the difficulty vanishes if only we recognize that what clinicians are doing is making probabilistic inferences, not syllogistic ones. Such inferences involve an appeal to a general premise of the form "Whenever x, then (with a probability P) y", where P may be more or less crudely specified, and a specific premise of the form "Here is a case of x".

This approach encounters two difficulties. First, in order to establish the general premise, i.e., that there is a certain

quantitative association (P) between x and y, one has to be able to establish the presence or absence of y independently of the presence or absence of x. From this it follows that y is essentially not inferred from x. Second, every clinician knows that, whatever premises of this kind may be available, he doesn't have them available, and his conclusions don't depend on having them available. A good empirical test here is to ask any clinician (a) what conclusions he has drawn recently, (b) what the premises were for those conclusions, and (c) what the empirical data is which establishes the probability or other association affirmed by the general premise. It might be informative to establish how many clinicians can give satisfactory answers to all three kinds of questions, and particularly the third.

But of course, no one expects clinicians to be able to do this. The statement that clinicians routinely draw conclusions as a result of making inferences is not an empirical conclusion; it is, rather, an ideological affirmation of a reductionistic, positivistic sort. Clinicians must be making inferences because you can't see what isn't real and the only things that are really real are postures and movements and other sensible data so clinicians must be inferring their conclusions from what they really see, which is postures, movements, etc.

Nonsense! The basic and general form of clinical judgment is obviously observational, not inferential. (As a practicing clinician, I can testify that the last time I made a clinical inference was

something like four years ago.) Unfortunately, traditional methodological theories in psychology have almost nothing to say about observation except (a) that one must make observations and perhaps (b) that postures, movements, etc. are the only things that can <u>really</u> be observed.

One of the background "givens" in this regard seems to be the principle that if one can be wrong, then it is not a matter of observation, hence it <u>must</u> be inference, even if it has then to be a magical sort of 'unconscious' inference that the clinician (or any other person) never knows he is making. For example, since one can be wrong about his being angry (etc., etc.), that must be a matter of inference.

In the early part of this century, perception was regarded as an amalgam of (a) a non-problematic "pure sensation" and (b) a fuzzy, mentalistic component, called "meaning" which had to be added in order to achieve experiential verisimilitude. We no longer take that seriously, recognizing that the supposedly "really real" sensation was an abstraction, and a tendentious one at that, and we have progressed to the point where we now talk about (a) a non-problematic "observation" of postures, movements, etc. and (b) a fuzzy, mentalistic component called "inference" which has to be added in order to achieve some degree of experiential verisimilitude.

The almost total inability of traditional and current academic psychology to generate concepts, theories, and

methodologies appropriate to clinical practice has resulted in the corresponding bifurcation of psychology into the academic and research practitioners on the one hand and the clinical, organizational, and social system practitioners on the other hand. And ignorant armies clash by night.

4. There is no general theory in psychology which is not fundamentally inadequate to account for language as a form of behavior.

I don't believe there is any disagreement on this point. There is not a general theory in psychology from which one could derive the slightest suspicion that there even was such a form of behavior as language at all. Much less do we have a general theory of behavior which allows us to specify what additional logical conditions make a behavior a linguistic behavior rather than some other sort.

Psychologists have had the option of conceptualizing and studying nonverbal behavior in general (and parenthetically referring to verbal behavior as being basically no different) or of conceptualizing and studying verbal behavior as such (taking their cue from the linguists). They have not had the option of doing both within the same conceptual framework. From the point of view of traditional theories of behavior, linguistic behavior is impossible behavior. This is not because these theories

overtly deny the facts concerning language, but rather because they have no substantive concepts which could give us any kind of grasp of linguistic phenomena as linguistic phenomena at all.

This type of difficulty is not peculiar to linguistic phenomena. It is found equally in trying to deal with mathematical, logical, moral, and aesthetic phenomena as well. Indeed, it appears in connection with almost all the forms of behavior which are distinctively human. (The presence of these difficulties is one of the correlates of the "baseball talk" distortions noted above.)

A special form of this difficulty has to do with science itself. Rationality on the part of scientific practitioners is a necessary condition for there to be such an enterprise as science. This fact is appealed to, explicitly or implicitly, whenever the authority of Science is invoked to support or attack a position. Yet rational behavior is an impossible form of behavior within, for example, a purely causal-historical framework (learning theory) or within a purely paramechanical framework ('cognitive' theories) or within a purely biological-mechanical framework (psychodynamic theories) or a framework in which non-rationality or irrationality are universal and more fundamental than rationality (Existential theories).

5. Finally, there is a whole set of intractable truth issues associated with traditional theorizing.

We can begin with the folklore concerning empiricism and the associated idea that research is primarily (and adequately) designed to test or demonstrate the truth of the theory from which the experimental hypotheses were generated, and perhaps even to reveal new truths at the level of theory (as contrasted with data).

We encounter a basic difficulty in that no experimental data can show that a theory of the sort we have in traditional psychology is true or false (in part, this is because such theories do not refer to "observables"). Historically, in the face of this difficulty, psychologists have reduced their claims, so that experimental results are only taken to "confirm" the theory. But the notion of "confirmation" has remained equivocal and murky and has spawned a variety of correlative issues.

The equivocal character of "confirmation" allows it to be used as a code word for "truth", as when psychologists affirm that "scientific studies have shown that . . ." and also as a code word for baseball talk, as when psychologists disclaim that "it's merely a convenient way of talking". But the latter also becomes a code word for "true" since psychologists seldom specify for what purposes, in what contexts, or at what cost their ways of talking are 'convenient'.

Technical issues are also generated by the notion of confirmation. Among them are issues concerning the appropriate operationalization of theoretical variables and other issues concerning the limits of legitimacy in drawing general conclusions based on a set of data. Beyond these, there is the more general problem of how empirical data can have any bearing at all on theories which are non-empirical in nature.

And beyond that there are some general problems with the notion of truth and the making or questioning of truth claims. The basic form of one of those problems is given by the myth of Atlas.

In reflecting on the fact that all the common objects we see around us are held up by something, and evidently it is, ultimately, the world that holds everything else up, the Greeks were led to ask, "What holds the world up?". The answer, according to the myth, is that there is a giant called Atlas who holds the world on his shoulder. This answer is satisfactory for a time, until it sinks in that now there is a new problem, namely, "What holds Atlas up?". The answer is that Atlas is standing on the back of a huge elephant, and that is satisfying only briefly, because it is quickly apparent that this raises a new question, namely, "What holds the elephant up?". The answer, picturesquely enough, is that the elephant is standing on the back of a gigantic tortoise. But now immediately this raises the question, "What holds the tortoise up?". The answer is, "The tortoise is swimming

in the eternal sea". Here the story ends, not because that is a satisfactory answer, but because one no longer knows what to say.

Essentially, the problem of truth, in the way that traditional philosophy and psychology have developed it, is the same as the problem of Atlas, namely the problem of necessary but impossible foundations. For, the only things which can be true or false in the relevant, straightforward sense are statements. But it is part of our methodology that to accept a statement as true merely "on faith" is illegitimate. Thus, as soon as a given statement is put forth as true, then that raises the question of foundations, and so we challenge, "How do you know that?". As it happens, the only way to provide evidence for a given statement is to make a second statement and put that forth as true. Hence the new statement can now be challenged, and the only thing that will serve is still another statement, and so on ad infinitum. No matter what foundations we place under our statements, and what foundations we place under our foundations, ultimately, there is no foundation but only the choice between an infinite regress of the "vicious" type or a completely arbitrary and fictitious 'foundation'.

A central part of the folklore of psychology is that psychological theories and the research associated with them embody the scientific search for truth. This leaves us with the Atlas problem, the problem that there cannot be any foundations and yet we must have them. The received wisdom on this matter is

"Well, you have to make some assumptions". Since the meagre possibility of being reassured by that depends on its being true, that is exactly as comforting as being told that the tortoise is swimming in the eternal sea.

Other forms of truth problem are easily found. Traditional psychological research methodology requires agreement among persons. Agreement is the preferred way of operationalizing Truth. You can't do research in the way it is currently done without depending in an essential way on agreement among observers from the outset. Yet agreement among observers is the exception rather than the rule. The most readily established brute observational fact in psychology is that people disagree in essentially all kinds of factual judgments (there are very few that would even be candidates for universal assent).

Disagreement among persons is not only more common than agreement; it also extends to the most fundamental matters. And it extends to the importance of disagreement as well; we will not find agreement about that, either.

Now, if disagreement and relativity are the rule, rather than the exception, then a methodology which a priori requires agreement from the very beginning could be expected to give us access to very few of the facts concerning people, and none of the most fundamental ones. Not surprisingly, the kinds of fact which psychologists have processed through their experimental machinery have been few in number and limited in scope.

Still another form of truth problem is that of self-contradiction (or paradox, in some of its variations). If we look at the substantive content of psychological theories, we find, if not agreement, at least a common factor. That is, either implicitly or explicitly, they all characterize behavior either as irrational or as non-rational. On the other hand, if we look at the philosophies of science which psychologists endorse, they always, without exception, require that scientists not only are capable of behaving rationally, but that they routinely do so.

The fine picture we are presented with, then, is that of a psychologist who endorses and actively uses a theory which says or implies that everybody's behavior is irrational or non-rational and at the same time endorses as the theory which underlies his scientific practice a theory of scientific behavior which says or implies that a psychologist as such must act rationally.

Contemplating this practice as well as the various others noted above, one has to wonder. When did we step through the looking glass?

A Different Spirit

The difficulties noted above are far from an exhaustive set. They are enough, however, to indicate the variety of difficulties inherent in traditional efforts at a psychological science and the manifold relationships among the various difficulties.

Each of these difficulties is decisive. That is, each of them, taken by itself, is grounds for concluding that any theoretical/methodological approach which creates that difficulty is, ipso facto, so unsatisfactory that it can be rejected out of hand as a candidate for a psychological science. To be sure, it should be emphasized that it is only by reference to conceptual criteria for what would qualify as a psychological science that these approaches are inadequate. If one merely wants to play baseball and do it in the way that it is done, then no problem of this sort could possibly arise, for then one accepts that science is merely whatever scientists say it is--if, of course, they can agree on what to say.

Given the number of decisive difficulties, it was obvious that something different was called for. Given the variety of these difficulties, spanning both substantive and methodological considerations, it was not difficult to come to the conclusion that one would have to begin the task of achieving a psychological science all over again from the beginning rather than trying to fix what was wrong. For one thing, it seemed entirely likely from

the outset that even the apparently modest task of formulating what was wrong would, if it were to be an illuminating basis for progress and not merely a list of complaints such as those above, require that we already have the more adequate alternative for which the need was evident. Conversely, the idea of an adequate psychological science did not in itself suggest any insuperable problems. Thus, a fresh start was indicated, and a fresh start was made.

In retrospect, it is possible to portray the spirit of the enterprise in a way which may be informative. Characteristically, the delineation is accomplished by reference to several maxims, or slogans.

1. <u>The world makes sense, and so do people.</u> They make sense <u>now</u>.

In particular, we do not need to wait upon (a) the advent of exciting new scientific theories or discoveries in the future, or (b) the entrance into the field of a coming genius, a second Isaac Newton, who will show us how it all fits together, or (c) the solution to some age-old problems of philosophy.

Historical contrast helps here. Part of the folklore of psychology, then and now, is that although psychology consists of disparate and apparently incommensurable fragments which make no sense as a whole, that should in no way shake our faith in the validity of what psychologists are doing; rather, we should also have faith that it will all make sense at some time in the future

when a certain critical new condition has been met. The three conditions mentioned in the preceding paragraph are the most commonly mentioned candidates for what that critical future condition is that will justify our blind faith now.

Without arguing any of these points, it is sufficient to say that they did then and still do now appear to be laughable and patently self-serving, though not demonstrably false. (Could any future history show them to be false?). One reason for this is that people and the world obviously make sense already, and whereas such a conclusion might later have to be tempered, since obviousness does not guarantee truth, to simply abandon it for the hope of a purely hypothetical counterpart is to lose touch with reality. Methodologically, it has the quality of stepping through the looking glass.

Note that we did not assume that things make sense. Indeed, given those precedents, we were prepared for the possibility of coming to a different conclusion. We might have reached the point of saying, regretfully, "Yes, that's what we found out. When we tried to cover the ground in a non-fragmented, non-absurd way, the ways in which we failed convinced us that it can't be done." The force of the slogan is that we would have put up a tremendous fight before accepting any such conclusion. That is the nature of slogans. Paradigmatically, a slogan affirms what you live by, not some statement which you happen to believe is true.

Commitments are personal, hence, unlike assertions of fact, they make no claims on other people. Obviously, most academic practitioners have made contrasting commitments. Thus, for understanding Descriptive Psychology and its history, it is important to recognize that the commitment to coherence as a standard of adequacy for formulations has been strongly present from the outset.

2. <u>It's one world.</u> Everything fits together. Everything is related to everything else.

Here again, a historical contrast is to the point. A student who goes through a normal college education or a post graduate education and takes it all literally will almost inevitably emerge as a fragmented and dehumanized individual. The reasons for this are simple and obvious. Every class the student takes provides a new framework, a new set of ideas, and often a multiplicity of frameworks (consider just the dozens of theories of learning, of motivation, of personality, of psychopathology, and so on). There is no conceptual framework within which they all fit, so that mastering each technical system to the point of having it actually available for use calls for a personal fragmentation. Further, if, in the face of this unsatisfying state of affairs, the student takes philosophy courses in the hope of finding there some way of putting it all together, he is taught that it's naive to think that there's any such thing and naive to suppose that fundamental

questions will ever be answered satisfactorily. And if he is inclined to fall back on his own common sense he is met with the scholarly ideology contained in textbooks (usually in the introduction or the summary) and the commentaries of "noted scientists", all to the effect that the technical frameworks of scientific theories supersede common sense, which has been shown to be naive and incoherent.

Two palliatives are offered. First, just as the folklore of psychology has it that it will take another Newton to put it all together and show how it all makes sense, the folklore of education has it that a good liberal education is what it takes to put it all together and show how it all makes sense. But there is now widespread awareness that traditional liberal education has nothing to offer that is not undermined by the accounts of scientists and does not amount to still more arbitrary frameworks. Second, there is the classic, and by now essentially discarded, 'hypothesis' that the various sciences will some day be formulatable within a single framework. It has been discarded largely because there is no evidence that suggests it is a real possibility and considerable grounds for supposing that it is an actual impossibility.

The result of such education leaves one with a variety of options which appear to be no more than variations on one or another of two unsatisfactory alternatives. The first is to live one's life like a succession of frames in a slide projector, being

switched from one conceptual framework to another by the succession of contexts one finds oneself in. The second is to settle for a given ideology or intellectual posture and pretend that its flaws are not crucial. Thus, the perennial attraction of Scientism, Eclecticism, Know-nothingism, skepticism, materialism, psychodynamics, mysticism, pragmatism, determinism, and so on.

Either choice leaves one largely alienated, limited, and powerless. And powerlessness corrupts.

3. Things are what they are and not something else instead. And they don't need something else to make them what they are.

Tradition requires that an adequate conceptual framework for a given subject matter applies universally over the range of that subject matter (e.g., a theory of learning must apply to all cases of learning, etc.). In psychology, the traditional solution to the problem of achieving universal applicability is to define the subject matter as something else instead, while at the same time reifying the concepts of one's own framework. Thus, when we step through the looking glass into the worlds of traditional psychology, behavior is really an operant or a discharge of instinctual energy, or a locomotion in a life space, or . . . ; and a person is really an organism or a phenomenological field, or . . . ; the subject matter of psychology is the responses of organisms (etc.); and emotions, experiences, thoughts, paranormal abilities, . . . and even ordinary choices are fictions; seeing an

orange is really the organismic production of a psychic object; and so on and on.

These substitutions, which have the general character of bait and switch, may be all very well for playing baseball, i.e., for carrying out those human activities which necessarily involve these ways of talking. However, they do not serve well as vehicles for studying and understanding persons and their actions. Thus, the slogan reflects a determination to stay on this side of the looking glass and address the real subject matter of persons and their behavior.

A Different Genre

What we have traditionally demanded, and what theorists have tried to provide in their general theories of behavior and persons is a set of fundamental truths concerning persons and behavior. The theory as such consists of a body of statements which, collectively, are a candidate for being that set of fundamental truths. From these we derive further truths, or at least further conclusions, and we are thereby led to observations, actions, and experiments. The theory provides the ultimate truth foundations for the remainder of our knowledge about the subject matter.

Our behavioral theories exemplify the Atlas problem in its clearest form, i.e., that in order to prevent an infinite regress of underpinnings we accept as ultimate what is in fact an arbitrary stopping point. An arbitrary stopping point in justification will be an equally arbitrary starting point for explanation. The presence of a broad variety of different and unfalsifiable general theories, and the ease with which students with little psychological sophistication can be taught how to make up comparable theories of their own, provides convincing empirical evidence both that the arbitrariness is really there in a brute practical sense and not merely in a fine methodological one and also that such theoretical formulations cannot possibly be fundamental.

Two thousand years of recorded history should be enough to convince any but the most faith-ridden observer that the problem of truth foundations and justification requirements really is as intractable as the Atlas myth shows it to be. If we require foundations for truths (and without that there are no truths, in the traditional view), then indeed we shall have to say ultimately that the turtle is swimming in the eternal sea. Thus, if we refuse to place ourselves in such a meretricious and disingenuous position we shall also need to abandon the classic soothsaying posture and engage in some other enterprise as a basic way of doing science and understanding people and what they do. And we may also take it that the notion of truth is derivative, not fundamental, though it need not thereby be entirely dispensible, either.

In short, it was clear from the outset that what was needed was not an alternative theory, but rather an alternative to theorizing. (Here again, there is no implication that theorizing should be completely dispensed with.) But what alternative could there be?

One way of arriving at an answer goes back to the observable fact that heterogeneity, relativity, and disagreement are ubiquitous whereas uniformity and agreement are partial and sometime things. If we ask, what do people disagree about, the answer is obvious. They disagree about facts, about states of affairs (and hence also, "truths"). If we do not take it that

disagreement is an unfortunate defect, failure, or happenstance which needs to be removed, denied, or glossed over (consider, e.g., the plight of evaluation research and psychotherapy outcome research where criterial disagreement is the general rule), we are free to take it as a warning and a reminder of some basic feature of the world of persons and their doings. And then we are free to ask what we could not have asked before, i.e., "How is that possible?" and "What enables people to accomplish disagreements about purported facts?".

Again, there is a simple and obvious answer, namely, that only people who share concepts can disagree about facts. Two people who share no concepts can only misunderstand each other; they cannot disagree with each other, since neither of them can deny what the other affirms.

The recognition that you can't disagree about facts if you don't share the relevant concepts provides the clue: concepts provide possibilities for getting at what is universal or fundamental in the domain of persons and behavior. Such possibilities are apparently not open to truth-oriented, assertional approaches just as truth possibilities are not open to concepts. Concepts, of course, are not truth-eligible; they cannot be true or false. Because of this, neither can they have assumptions or presuppositions or evidential support. They are not missing anything, either, by virtue of not having these possibilities.

The possibilities of universality can be illustrated in the following heuristic way. In order to disagree about a particular fact, two persons must share the concepts in terms of which the fact is stated. (More rigorously, they must share the concepts in terms of which the disputed state of affairs is formulated.) For example, in order to disagree about whether there is a cup on the table they must share at least the concepts of "cup", "table", and "on". That is simple enough.

But now, suppose we ask, is there a conceptual strucure (a conceptual organization of concepts) such that if all persons shared that concept then they would be able to agree or disagree with each other in all the ways that we know that they do or could. What such a conceptual structure might be is not at all obvious from the statement of the problem, and we have no assurance a priori that there is such a conceptual structure at all. The Person Concept is a candidate for being such a structure. Subject to caveats about the current completeness of detail in the formulation, we can say that if all persons shared the Person Concept, as formulated in Descriptive Psychology, or any equivalent structure, that would enable them to agree or disagree in all of the ways we know that people do or could. Of course, that is only one way of understanding the Person Concept.

Thus, the primary strategy in Descriptive Psychology has been to begin by formulating conceptual structures (systematically related sets of distinctions) rather than the traditional

statements or theories. Some important differences are evident from the start. For example, distinctions do not stand on their own in the way that statements do. A set of distinctions does not constitute a neat, self-contained picture of the world in the way that a statement, description, or theory does. Distinctions don't say anything. Rather, distinctions are used (or not used), acted on (or not acted on), and the primary interest, for a psychological science, is in distinctions which are acted on by persons. Of course, saying something is one way to use, or act on, a given set of distinctions.

The conceptual structures formulated in Descriptive Psychology (including the formulations of Person and Behavior) are designed to be used by persons (as conceptualized), in their behavior (as conceptualized). There is some degree of risk involved. The risk is that if the formulations are not apt it is likely that they will not be used effectively. Note that accepting or acknowledging this risk is very different from believing, assuming, or hypothesizing that the people who might use Descriptive Psychology formulations actually exemplify those formulations.

Note also that acting on state of affairs concepts (see "What Actually Happens") is in general not visibly different from acting on beliefs. I act on the concept of there being a cup on the table, i.e., if I drink from the cup, that will not look different to an observer from the case where I consider the statement that there is a cup on the table, then appraise the statement as true,

so that I believe it, and finally, act on that belief. For those to whom any alternative to a truth/foundation orientation is unthinkable, talking in this way about acting on concepts will appear to be a merely verbal device to evade the real problems of discovering Truth or to avoid admitting assumptions. For those who are not limited in this way, the correspondence serves as an assurance that any empirical reality to which a truth approach might give us access will also be available to us under a conceptual approach.

A second basic strategy, which is reflected in the overall sequence of Descriptive Psychology formulations, has been to follow a "top-down" approach. This notion is intuitively simple, though it can be explicated only through a variety of examples. Among such examples are (a) from the whole to the parts; from the larger to the smaller, (b) from the general to the specific, (c) from the essential, archetypal, primary, or fundamental to the accidental, derivative, or secondary, (d) from the abstract to the concrete, and (e) from significance to implementation.

Given that the enterprise was a conceptual approach, the top-down aspect is reflected in the sequence of conceptual formulations, beginning with an all-encompassing concept nominally described as the Person Concept or as the Human Model, then to a primary articulation into major conceptual structures (Reality, Person, Behavior, Language, Status), then to more detailed formulations, and ultimately to a variety of real world

applications. This sequence is shown in Table 1. The top-down approach does much toward guaranteeing that "It's all one world" in the Descriptive-Psychology formulation.

Insert Table 1 about here

As noted in Table 1, we already have intuitive concepts of reality, persons, behavior, language, relationship, and so on. And we already understand that these are not simple discrete phenomena, but rather are interconnected in a variety of ways both conceptually and empirically. However, it is one thing to have intuitively familiar concepts but it is quite another to have systematically formulated ones.

Moreover, in the task of formulating a world which is coherent rather than fragmented, it is not enough to make the right substantive distinctions. Even if we begin with an adequate set of distinctions, that will avail us little if we do not do the right things with them. Indeed, from the outset, one of the basic problems was how to make an adequate beginning, and mainly, how to introduce problems and subject matter in a non-reductive, non-evasive, and non-assumptive way ("Things are what they are and not something else instead"). We began by asking "Given such a task, how does it make sense to proceed?", and the result was not the reinvention of the familiar techniques which have come to be equated with the methodology of science. Rather, the result was the formulation and use of a number of conceptual-notational devices, some of which are shown in Table 1.

Although not all of these conceptual-notational devices are, as such, unique to Descriptive Psychology, the availability and pervasive use of such devices is a central and distinctive feature of the enterprise. The mastery of the logic of these devices and the facility for using them effectively is not acquired casually. More generally, the methodology of Descriptive Psychology is as distinctive as its conceptual formulations. Thus, as an alternative to theorizing, Descriptive Psychology is not merely a new conceptual idiom; it is also a new intellectual discipline.

Still, from the outset, choosing an adequate set of conceptual distinctions to work with was a primary focus of attention. As with any construction task, so it is with conceptual construction; if you create the wrong pieces to begin with, they will not fit together properly or work together effectively, and the further pieces or constructions you create from them or with them will perpetuate and almost certainly exacerbate the deficiencies. Working with inadequate concepts leads into blind alleys, into confusion, into contradiction and paradox, into intellectual check-kiting and jury-rigging, and into separate and incommensurable worlds or into neat but fatally oversimplified ones. This general observation is, in effect, a tautology, but it was also a compelling empirical generalization covering our history of philosophical and psychological theorizing.

Conversely, if you create the right distinctions for the task at hand, then everything will fit together. In one way or another, everything will be related to everything in a coherent way; everything will be included, with no fragments or loose ends; unless you mishandle the distinctions, you will be able to move readily from one thing to another to another without undue forcing or fudging; and "It's all one world". This is a tautology also. Which is to say that the only thing which necessarily distinguishes a set of concepts which is a good set is that in fact it <u>is</u> a good set. ("Things don't need something else to make them what they are.")

Because of the variety of ways in which a set of concepts adequate to the task at hand is different from a set which is inadequate, there are strong reality constraints on whether a given set is adequate or not. Thus, it is of little moment that there are innumerable sets of distinctions which people do use or have used for various purposes and that we are limited only by our vision and inventiveness in creating new ones. In practice, there are three questions which have been used routinely in making practical evaluations of the adequacy of the primary conceptual formulations shown in Table 1.

The first is "Do they <u>at face value</u> give us the complete coverage we want?". It would be difficult to imagine anything that does not fall within the scope of the concepts of Reality, Person, Behavior, Language, and Relationship or Status.

The second question is "Do they fit together?". In response to this concern, as well as for practical purposes, a substantial amount of work has been done, not to prove that they fit together but rather to explicate how they fit together (see, e.g., Ossorio, 1965, 1969/1978, 1971/1978, 1982). Not surprisingly, it is only by using the distinctive methodology of Descriptive Psychology that an explicit systematic representation of the relationships among the major conceptual structures can be given.

The third question is, "Do they leave you in a position to take the next step?". As it happens, the only compelling demonstration that the primary formulations do leave us in the position to take the next step is the successful accomplishment of the next step. Formally, the next step is an articulation of the primary conceptual structures into more specific and less fundamental concepts. Substantively, it is at this stage that most of the "topics" which characterize traditional psychological thinking and research (and textbooks) appear. The range of such subject matters, or topics, which have already been articulated in Descriptive Psychology is illustrated in Table 1 under the heading of "Secondary Formulations". Here again, we begin with concepts which we have already acquired informally through socialization and cultural participation and which we understand (more or less) intuitively. Here again, the challenge is to accomplish a systematic formulation of the "topic" concept in a way which

places it within the Person Concept formulation and is intuitively acceptable.

The point of the latter criterion is that there is no inherent virtue in reproducing exactly whatever distinctions are in general use. Rather, the fact that a distinction is in general use serves to indicate where a systematic formulation is a propos. For example, the fact that we do distinguish between pathology and health indicates that there are some important distinctions to be made there. And we do have a formulation of pathological states and their related phenomena. To be sure, many would argue that the Descriptive-Psychology concept of a pathological state is not what they mean by "pathology". So be it. Our concern is with understanding the phenomenon, not with reproducing how people have already talked about it and thought about it. Others would argue that now, for the first time, they understand clearly what they have been talking about in referring to "pathology", and still others would say "yes, it's a new concept but it seems more serviceable than the old concept of pathology," and so on. There is no single, universally used concept of pathology in existence, and the Descriptive Psychology formulation has as good a claim as any to being "what we mean by 'pathology'". The paper on pathology (Ossorio, in press) is a good example of a second level formulation. (The formulation of "self concept" in "What Actually Happens" is a less detailed example.) Since at this level we are

essentially formulating subject matter, the work is still at a conceptual, not empirical, level.

Here again, there are strong reality constraints on whether such second level formulations are successful and there are several questions which serve as practical touchstones in this regard.

The first question is, as noted above, "Is it intuitively acceptable?", which is a variation on "At face value, does it do the job?". The formulation of pathological states illustrates the case where the formulation is intuitively acceptable.

The second question is, "Do they fit together?". Secondary formulations fit within the overall conceptual structure; that much is guaranteed by the fact that they are generated from the latter by a top-down approach. However, there are also some strong requirements (depending, of course, on the specific topics in question) that the second level formulations also fit together among themselves. The formulation of pathology illustrates how the concept of pathology requires, and relates to, a variety of other concepts such as those of personal characteristics, needs, social practices, communities, appraisals, deliberate action, explanation, disability, and so on.

In this regard, the phenomenon of playing a trump (or serving an ace, or getting 5 percent significance, etc.) can serve as a heuristic example. The phenomenon is observationally discrete; I can point to something and say, correctly, "There's an example of

playing a trump". Yet it is conceptually and existentially (not Existentially) defined by its place within a network of other concepts and phenomena (e.g., if a game were not taking place there, what I pointed to would not be a case of playing a trump). Similarly, although the phenomena we elect to study as behavioral scientists are often observationally discrete, they are conceptually and existentially defined by the place they have in human life and, correspondingly, by their relationships to one another. It is within this framework that "everything hangs together", and we will not be missing anything humanly or scientifically important if there is no other framework within which this is the case; this is one reason why the idea that we need a second Newton to come along and finally pull it all together is laughable, though not necessarily false. Conversely, if we do a poor job of formulating those subject matters which have been salient enough in human life to command our interest as behavioral scientists, then, no matter what we do with our customary techniques of data gathering and data analysis, we will be unable to study those subject matters. Barring sheer accident or the intervention of whimsical demons, of course.

The third question is, "Does it leave you in a position to take the next step?". Here again, just as the actual accomplishment of second level formulations is generally the most effective way of vindicating the claim that the primary formulations did leave us in a position to take the next step, so,

likewise, actual accomplishments at the third level are the most effective way of vindicating the claim that the prior formulations have put us in a position to take the next step. However, whereas at the second level we have, in the main, only one option, i.e., continuing the conceptual formulation, when we reach the third level we have earned four practical options.

The first option, of course, is that we can continue the sequence of conceptual formulation to a new level of detail. For example, we can continue from the general formulation of a pathological state to the conceptual formulation of more particular sorts of pathological state, e.g., of depression (Ossorio, 1977), of manic states (Wechsler, 1983), of obsessive-compulsive states (Bergner, 1981), or of pathological patterns of self criticism (Driscoll, 1981), as well as a variety of others codified as heuristic images (Ossorio, 1977). Some further conceptualization is almost always involved in the other three options.

The second option is to create a theory about the subject matter, or "topic", for which we have a conceptual formulation. The normative concept of a scientific theory in Descriptive Psychology is a relatively distinctive one which can be explicated as follows.

The conceptual formulation of a subject matter delimits the logical possibilities of what instances of the subject matter there could be. For example, the conceptual formulations would

delimit what would qualify as a case of pathology or of playing a trump or of learning or of having an attitude, etc. Within this framework of logical possibilities, a theory is a set of statements which specifies a more limited set of possibilities and carries the claim that all actual cases will fall within the more restricted set. Pro forma: "The concept of a learning history allows for all of these and these . . . and these possibilities, but I claim that all actual instances will fit this narrower set of specifications given by my theory". (A classic specification in this regard is that the to-be-learned behavior is followed by a "reward" when it occurs.)

An example of such a theory is Littmann's (1979) theory of humor. A theory of this sort is, paradigmatically, literally and directly falsifiable by empirical data. This is because (a) the theory is formulated within the same conceptual system as the subject matter and therefore deals with observables, and (b) the theory carries two claims, i.e., that it applies without exception within the scope of the subject matter and that it is true. These are strong claims and the theory is correspondingly open to refutation and revision.

The third option is to introduce a new conceptual formulation, as in the case of a theory, but without the claim to truth and, paradigmatically, without the claim to universality. Instead, the claim is that there is a point in talking about the phenomenon in terms of the new formulation and in acting

accordingly. Normatively, there is some specification of when there is a point in talking that way and what the point is, e.g., in certain contexts, under certain conditions, for certain purposes, and so on.

The conceptual formulation involved in this third option is designated as a "model" and reflects the conceptual formulation of empiricism in "What Actually Happens" (Ossorio, 1971/1978). Talking about the phenomenon in terms of a model will generally be an instance of "baseball talk" as described above. Examples of models within Descriptive Psychology are provided by Marshall's (in press) scenarios for alcoholism, Roberts' (in press) formulation of dreaming as world reconstruction, and Vanderburgh's (1983) Positive Health Developmental Model.

Most current theories in psychology and other behavioral sciences qualify only as models in the present sense. This is because they are formulated by reference to unobservable hypothetical entities (structures, processes, probabilities, etc.) and therefore cannot be falsified by empirical data. Since they cannot be falsified, any claim to truth would be vacuous posturing. Thus, the strongest claim that could be reasonably ventured is that there is, sometimes, depending on what one is up to, a point in talking that way and acting accordingly. Such claims are defeasible.

The fourth option is to act directly in terms of the conceptual formulation (with whatever further conceptual

elaborations might be needed. The vindication of such action is that it accomplishes some result or achieves a product which is of recognized value. This is the most common use of Person Concept formulations to date and could probably be described as paradigmatic.

Table 1 gives a partial listing of results which have been accomplished to date. This is done under the three "Applications" headings which show, respectively, topic areas which have been successfully addressed, activities in which the conceptual formulations have been used successfully, and more or less tangible products which have been created through the use of the conceptual formulations. The range of applications shown in Table 1 appears to be greater than the range of applications (though not the sheer number of them, of course) of either psychoanalytic theories or learning theories, which are apparently the two most widely used conceptual genres in psychology today. At a minimum, it does not suffer by comparison.

Table 1. The Person Concept

Intuitive Concepts	Conceptual-Notational Devices
	Parametric Analysis (PA) Paradigm Case Formulation (PCF) Calculational Systems (CS) Definitions (Df) Formulas Schemas Maxims ↓
Person World Behavior Language Representation	**Primary Conceptual Formulations**
↘	**Reality** (CS, PA): world, object, process, event, state of affairs, relationship, reality constraints **Behavior** (Formula, PA, CS): intentional action, forms of behavior and behavior description **Person** (Df, PA): personal characteristics, personal change, life history **Language** (Formula, PA, CS): special case of deliberate action **Status** (Maxims, Formulas): behavior potential, relationship, social structure, part-whole ↓
	Secondary Formulations
Culture	Culture, society, institutions, social practices, social systems
Self	Self, self concept, self presentation, self relationships
Knowledge	
Observation	Actor-Observer-Critic
Science Experience →	Knowledge, observation, empiricism, objectivity, truth, reality
Truth	Personal change, learning
Thinking	Personality, assessment, psychopathology
Learning	Ultimates, totalities, boundary conditions, ways of living
Intuition	
Methodology	Research, methodology, evaluation
Research	
Evaluation	
Psychopathology	
etc.	

Table 1. The Person Concept (concluded)

Applications (Using the Distinctions)		
Products	Activity Applications	Topic Applications
Writing:	Research	Social systems
	Assessment	Organizations
methodological	Psychotherapy	Criminal justice
conceptual	Organizational	Dream interpretation
empirical	training	Child development
	consultation	Meaning, symbolism
Diagrams	Database design	Emotions
	Education	Unconscious motivation
Teaching Procedures	Conflict resolution	Multicultural psychology
	Software development	Psychopathology
Psychotherapy	Discourse analysis	Research
	System design,	Cognition
images	analysis	Theory of empiricism
scenarios	System evaluation	Self-regulation,
choice principles	Evaluation research	rationality
	Information S&R	Database theory
Research Paradigms	(libraries)	Artificial intelligence
	Rehabilitation	Personality
pragmatic	programs	Assessment
precaution	Prevention	Male-Female
simulation	programs	Language
	Mental health	Methodology
Computer programs	service delivery	Theology, religion,
		spirituality
information systems		Consciousness
		Psychotherapy
		Social interaction
		Personal relationships
		etc.

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