THE SELF AND THE EGO¹

BY KNIGHT DUNLAP

I have been asked to make clearer my distinction between the 'Self' and the 'Ego,' and I think I can do so by explaining more fully my fundamental psychological postulates.

My conception of the empirical self and my further notion of the Ego as an essential presupposition of psychology, which I have set forth in Chapters XVI. and XX. of "A System of Psychology" are organic parts of a general view which discards completely the psychophysical theory of Descartes, which theory, or rather Malebranche's amplification thereof, has become so firmly embedded in modern thought that it is usually accepted without question by psychology, science and common sense. It is necessary that I make this general statement, for I admit without hesitation that the attempt to put my notions concerning the Ego into orthodox Cartesian terms is useless.

In the first place, I postulate the reality of the sensible world. Those who choose to postulate its unreality are free to do so, just as those who postulate the proposition that two straight lines may be drawn through a given point parallel to a given line are free to do so. As there is built up on this postulate of parallel lines an entirely coherent system of geometry, so on the postulate that the world of sensible things is unreal and that reality lies in the world of non-sensible matter, an entirely coherent system of psychology might be constructed. I do not think it has yet been done, however.

In the second place, I insist on a strict use of the term *consciousness* (or its equivalents), and the discrimination of the two ways in which that term is currently used. If we use it for the awareness, or being aware of, a datum we have no

¹ A contribution to a symposium before the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, at The Johns Hopkins University, April 9, 1913.

business to use it also for the datum itself (say a sensible datum or color, which for exactness we may call a *sentientum*¹). If we do use it promiscuously in both ways, we introduce into psychology the same lack of significance which would be introduced into a lease by using 'lessee' and 'lessor' interchangeably in the same document.

It is curious that psychologists in general seem to have been bent on the ignoring of the distinction between consciousness and its object. James recognized the distinction very clearly, but buried the evidence so deep in his *magnum opus* that most of us who were brought up on James never had a gleam of it, but were taught that the 'state of consciousness' was both the awareness of the red, and the red color itself, whereas it was, for James, neither.

The distinction between the content and the consciousness of it: between the *sentientum* and the *sentiens*, may perhaps be made clear by supposing for the moment that a color exists whether anyone is aware of it or not. There is, let us say, a spot of red on the wall. I may see that red spot and attend to the *red*. It is the *red itself* of which I am speaking now, not the ether vibration. I never perceive directly the ether vibration. I may never have heard that there are such things. But I see the *red*. Now, let me close my eyes; let everyone else in the room close their eyes; let God close His eyes. Let us now all think of things other than red: of the high cost of living; or one of Glück's operas, for example. Assume that the red is unchanged, as for all we know, it may indeed be. Now the red, still existing but unperceived, is the *sentientum*, the potential content. When I again open my eyes and turn my head in the proper direction, the red goes right on existing, but awareness of the red is now added. The red is unchanged, but becomes a 'content of my consciousness.' There are then two factors to be reckoned with: the red and my awareness of it.

The distinction holds, while red is a content, no matter whether the red exists 'out of consciousness' or not. The supposition that red exists when not perceived brings out

¹ See 'The Nature of Perceived Relation,' *PSYCHOLOGICAL REVIEW*, 1912, XVI., p. 416.

sharply the distinction between the red and the perception of it, but the truth or falsity of the supposition has no effect on the situation while red is being perceived. It is as if we had before us a quiet, smooth-shaven man. By assuming that when he grows a beard, he will still be quiet, I may bring out the distinction between quietness and beardlessness, although the actual fact may be that when he grows whiskers, he becomes noisy and violent.

Once recognized, the distinction between the content and the consciousness simplifies the business of the psychologist immediately and immensely. For one thing, the elaborate doctrine of copy-images, with their many contradictory features, may be thrown overboard at once.¹ And I may remark in an aside that I believe that if this dead weight be jettisoned, psychology may escape the utter shipwreck in which, in the estimation of all non-psychologizing scientists and the estimation of many psychologists also, it seems now to be tossing.

We have, therefore, two problems before us. First, the analysis of the objects of content, in the attempt to discover the number of elements and their peculiarities; the study of the processes in content; and the study of the conditions (physical, in the broad sense) under which the various forms and elements appear. Parenthetically I may remark that the lions which have long stood in the way here are seen to have neither teeth nor claws, when we recognize that we are not dealing directly with consciousness. The often repeated statement that however we may analyze the concrete experience into elements, the experience was just as unitary as the elements, is seen to mean merely that whereas the content of an experience may be complex, the consciousness or experience of that content is not complex; or rather, that we do not analyze it.

In the second place we have the study of the conditions of consciousness. We can never directly observe consciousness, since consciousness is always the observation of a content.

¹ On the question of 'imagery' I shall, at the suggestion of one of the most discriminating of the reviewers of my book, attempt to make myself clear in a separate article.

We can, and must, however, examine the physiological conditions of consciousness; and also its logical conditions.

Consciousness, we find, has degrees. I am attentive or less attentive; the content is high or low in vividness. These things are partially synonymous. 'Consciousness,' 'attention' and 'vividness' are ways of expressing the fact of awareness in various degrees. To this I will return in a moment.

We may also be conscious in different ways, irrespective of differences in vividness. We may be conscious of content which is said to be 'present'; this consciousness I prefer to call by the old name *intuition*. Or we may be conscious of content not present. This we call *imagination*. Please take notice that these statements are not definitions. 'Present' content means merely 'intuited content' and 'not present' content means merely 'not intuited' content or 'imagined' content.

Other ways of being conscious are distinguished, the classification having possibly (but not certainly) no reference to the two classifications just mentioned. Consciousness of certain sorts of content is called *sensory* apprehension or *sensory* intuition: sometimes it is called *sensation*: but the term 'sensation' is more frequently used for the 'sentiendum.' The confusion is here so great that we would do well to exclude the term sensation from scientific discourse. Consciousness of certain other sorts of content is called *intellect*, popularly at least, and should be so called scientifically. Whether we are to apply the term 'feeling' to a way of being conscious, or to the affective content, is yet to be decided. At present it is applied equally to both.

Another division is between *introspection* and whatever is left over from that; non-introspective observation. Although I have no use for the orthodox *theory* of introspection, I propose to use the term, and to define it and use it as it is actually used by modern psychologists; namely, to signify the observation of kinesthetic and somatic sensations, and of affective contents. The only difference between my usage of the term and the usage of psychologists in general is that I explicitly define it as I use it, and that others sometimes, but not uni-

formly, include under it the analysis of the ideal content of imagination (so-called 'images').

Now I have outlined a simple system of psychology which covers all the ground in a way which seems to me to offer greater possibilities in the way of research than does the Cartesian method. I have provided for the recognition of a Self, which is basally the body, as constituted by the kinaesthetic and somatic sensations, and by the 'feelings.' *Introspection* is rightly called *self-observation*. Emotions, since they are fundamentally complexes of bodily sensations and feelings, are rightly said by philosophers of all ages to be modifications or passions, of the Self. This, of course, does not exhaust the Self, but merely specifies the essential basis. The relations of this constantly experienced, and in itself relatively constant basis, to the more variable objects of 'external experience,' are also important. I am not at present interested in delimiting the Self; I do not know that it is possible to show where the Self leaves off and the non-Self begins. I am merely interested in identifying the concrete basis, or I might say, the core of the Self. I might go on another tack and show the importance of this Self, or rather of the rhythmic changes which are inherent in it, in determining our thought processes, but that is also out of the present line of interest.

I have now covered by title all the ground which can be studied, but I have also definitely involved something (if I may beg the use of the word *thing* in a rather vague sense), which cannot be studied, although the involution of the 'thing' cannot be escaped.

There is more to be considered than the content and the consciousness. Each awareness has a reference other than to the content. This may be made clear in the following way. Suppose three items of content, which we may designate as *a*, *b*, and *c*. Suppose I am aware of *a*, then of *b*, and then of *c*. The situation is quite different from that in which I am aware of *a*, another person aware of *b*, and a third person aware of *c*. This is so, even if we neglect the differences in *a*, *b* and *c* as they appear to three different persons. Neither is it true

that the awareness of *a*, *b* and *c* by myself establishes, or is the establishment of, a specific relation among the three. Assuming the existence of the three, there is no relation among them after I have perceived them that did not exist before I perceived them. This is demonstrable through the fact that my perception of the three items is not dependent on the perception of any particular relation among them. *a* may be brighter than *b*, and *b* than *c*, but I may successively perceive the three and not notice these relations at all. This proposition is true for any other relation that can be named. It is clearly not plausible that some relation, not specified, can account for the fact that I perceive all three.

The fact that I perceive all three, twist it as we may, remains to the end an ultimate, utterly inexplicable fact. The important thing about the situation that we are supposing is that they, the three items,—*a*, *b* and *c*,—are perceived by the same I. The perceptions are not the same; they may be temporarily separated by considerable intervals. What is the identity? Merely the identity of the I, the Ego. Manifestly, that which is identical in the case of the three perceptions is not that which is not identical. There is, therefore, the Ego, which must be discriminated from the awareness, perceptions or experiences which refer in common to the Ego.

Experience, consciousness, or whatever we may call that 'knowing' which James calls 'the most mysterious thing in the world,'¹ is quite clearly a polarized affair. At one end it refers logically to that which is known; at the other, to that which knows. Yet it is not in strict accuracy to be called a relation between the two, for a relation, as it is elsewhere understood, is between two objects, or knowable items, thus involving the possibility of this very consciousness of which we are speaking. We must be satisfied with considering consciousness as absolutely unique and irresolvable; there is nothing else in its class. We may call it an act, a relation, a quality, a process, a machine, or anything else, if we understand that these terms do not really describe it; for all of these terms refer primarily to objectivity and are intelligible only because we refer them

¹ James, 'Principles of Psychology,' I., p. 216.

to definite objective facts, and hence in applying them to consciousness we treat it as if it were objective.

There are thus three sorts of things which are immediately postulated as soon as we begin to talk of experience. *First*, the items which are experienced. *Second*, the experiencing of these items. You can no more talk about the objects without postulating the experience of these objects than you can talk about experience without postulating something which is experienced. *Third*, in postulating the object, or in postulating the experience of the object, you postulate that which experiences. We cannot talk of experiencing without an I which experiences; I can talk of the experience which I 'have,' but not of any which I don't 'have' or which is not exactly analogous to that which I 'have.' And it is certainly true that I 'have' no experience which I don't 'have.' We might suppose the existence of uncoördinated experiences, but these are then by hypothesis experiences which I do not have and which no other Ego 'has,' and hence are not to be considered as anything more than hypothetical. In other words, all experiences which are other than merely hypothetical, intrinsically postulate the I.

But what have we postulated when we have postulated the Ego? Nothing more, so far, than a certain coördination of experiences. There is one coördination of experiences which is expressed by saying that two experiences may be of the same object. It may be held that such a coördination does not exist: that no two experiences can be of the same object: this proposition is, however, itself an arbitrary postulate, a postulate, that is, which is in no wise necessary. We can avoid both this and the contrary postulation by saying that *if* two experiences are of the same object, there is *ipso facto* a correlation of experiences, and we may call that the *objective* correlation. Now all we have been claiming is expressed by saying that in addition to this possible objective correlation of experiences, there is an undoubted and unavoidable correlation of another kind, which we may conveniently call the *subjective* correlation, thereby fixing explicitly our use of the term subjective. This correlation is one of identity, and just as we

name the identity in the case of the objective correlation the *object*, we name the identity in the case of the subjective correlation the *subject*, or *Ego*. The object can be observed, and hence we can say more about it than merely to name it. The subject, however, is not observable, but is that which observes, and hence we can do nothing but name it, which we do by calling it the subject, the Ego, or that which observes.

It may be objected that the subject really is more than the observer; that it feels and wills as well as knows. This objection cannot be maintained. What we loosely call 'to feel' is really to observe or experience an affective content or feeling. To will is to experience a particular thing, namely, a feeling of desire or repugnance, in connection with some other content. The sole function of the Ego reduces absolutely to that of knowing, or, in other words, the sole subjective correlation is the correlation of experience.