A place for everything, and everything in its place

John Radford

THAT WAS the admirable advice of Mrs Beeton in 1861. In this issue of the *Review* we have 16 papers on the general theme of the 'place' of psychology, particularly in education and more particularly in higher education. The editor and I are most grateful for these very interesting and valuable contributions. They arose from my paper *Psychology in its place*' (PTR, 14(1)). That was originally written with no thought of responses but as a one-off discussion of various issues. There was an unusually long delay between acceptance and publication, due to a change of editor. Some of my figures became out of date, but I don't think that affected any of the issues. When it was in press, the new editor, Paul Sander, and I came up with the idea that some people might care, not necessarily to reply to me, but rather to express views on the issues I raised, or any related ones. Invitations were sent to a wide range of individuals and organisations such as the member networks of the Society. Sixteen is obviously a tiny sample of the membership of the Society, well over 40,000 strong, let alone the very much larger number of psychology graduates and others with a serious interest. Nevertheless, several themes do emerge from the disparate contributions.

Before mentioning these, I will pick up two papers which directly comment on my original one, though I feel with some misunderstanding of what I was trying to say. John Newland raises two issues which he says are lacking in my paper. As he says, the two are closely related though not identical. One is the place of psychology in the political context. He is quite right, I did neglect this, and it is most important. Indeed, I suggest it goes further even than he proposes. There is first, as he says, the unavoidable fact that psychology has to compete within the educational system for resources and prestige, and I agree entirely that the status of being a science is an important factor here. I myself fought several battles over this, in general successfully. But there is also the fact that psychologists are engaged in political issues in the wider sense (as I do touch on in my paper). Psychological research and results are vitally relevant to many political issues, ranging from general education and child rearing, to penal policies, to the effects of mass media, and so on. The Society is very active in trying to bring psychological expertise to bear on such matters. There are also issues about the involvement of psychologists in activities such as the treatment of political prisoners, or the presentation of governmental propaganda. All these are complex and difficult matters.

John Newland disagrees with me when I say that a discipline does not have boundaries. Congruent with the foregoing, he argues that boundaries are essential in the political arena. He says that I make a distinction between a *profession*, which has boundaries, and a *discipline* which does not. But I also distinguish both of these from a *subject*, that is, the organisation of material and resources (including the human ones), generally for the purposes of dissemination, especially teaching. The boundaries he describes are appropriate to psychology as a subject. They are unavoidable, not only for political purposes but for everyday use. Any examinable course, for example, must have a syllabus, which must be available to the students. Otherwise no valid and fair examina-

tion can be set. Researchers and teachers must have control over their laboratories and other resources, or at least defined rights of access, and so on. I have banged on about these distinctions for some years now, but I still think they are both important and often neglected. I have argued, for example, that they lie behind the disputes over the role and value of the Graduate Basis of Registration. A discipline, I want to stress, in my view does not and cannot have boundaries. It is intrinsic to the nature of a discipline, regarded as an enquiry into a set of apparently related problems, that nothing can be ruled out in principle. The notorious 'madness' of George III is now thought to have resulted from the disease porphyria. Whether or not this is correct, it would be absurd for a historian to refuse to consider it on the grounds that it is a matter of medicine, not history. It is equally absurd to hold that some enquiries are 'psychology' and others not, on a territorial basis. All that matters is whether they help to illuminate a problem.

This brings me to Tom Dickins' paper. He says that I espouse

> *'a strange relativism about the subject, arguing that we ought to take seriously the "psychologies" of other cultures and embrace allied disciplines'.*

I don't think this is relativism. Relativism to me means regarding all views (or cultures, etc.) as of equal (or no) value. I don't think that the views about human behaviour of, say, traditional Christian or Hindu thinkers are of equal value to ours, because while they are the result of much experience, thought and insight, they lack the empirical foundation which is now being established. 'Original sin', and reincarnation, for example, are (on my reading of the evidence) just not true. But this does not mean that the views are of no value, or irrelevant. They are part of what humans have thought and do think about themselves, and are part of the data of Psychology. If our aim is to understand behaviour, this must include behaviour in different times and cultures (just as Tom himself argues that we must include other species). As to embracing allied disciplines, I don't regard disciplines as entities to be 'embraced' or rejected. Every scientist, indeed every serious pursuer of an enquiry, must seek whatever is of use. The label is irrelevant. '*Je prends mon bien oú je le trouve*', as Molière wrote. Tom also says that he does not share my '*anthropocentric vision of psychology – for me it is all about behaving creatures*'. If 'anthropocenric' implies that I think psychology should only be about human beings, I reject that. But while disciplines may not have boundaries, they do have something that justifies the use of different labels. In my view that is a focus, by which I mean the main aim of the enquirers. A focus may be broad or narrow. 'Behaving creatures' is obviously wider than 'human beings'. It is factually correct, however, that the vast bulk of work we recognise as 'psychology' is concerned with humans, as are the majority of 'psychologists' even if they carry different titles . This in no way means rejecting the fact that we are part of the animal kingdom. I would also maintain that human behaviour is in many ways unique.

Tom's argument is in the context of advancing a case for an evolutionary

> *'theory of human nature that avoids essentialist claims by embedding accounts of humans within a broader theory of nature'.*

This is partly in response to what he sees as my failure to provide criteria for selection and combination of data (given my unselective 'relativism'); criteria which would be

> *'based on a particular theoretical perspective of how the world works'.*

I am not sure that I have such a perspective. I do have a perspective of how we should go about trying to understand how the world works. It is that of science. By that I mean observing, measuring, investigating, experimenting, testing and falsifying, as far as we can, and all as objectively as we can manage, recognising that we (psychologists) are ourselves part of the subject matter, and that our own individuality affects what we do. I think Tom might agree with that. And I would entirely agree with him that the behaviour of

ourselves and other species cannot be understood without its evolutionary development. I also agree with a later point, that therefore evolutionary psychology should not be considered as a subsection of the content of psychology. I do not think, however, that evolution does or can provide an explanation for the whole of human behaviour including mental processes. I am not going to go into what 'explanation' may mean. Evolution gives an account of how we come to have finger nails. But it doesn't tell me why some of us, *and not others*, paint them. Evolutionary theory shows us the roots of aggression and religiosity, but I do not think it accounts for suicide bombers. I want a psychology that does.

Psychology in the political context, and the nature of Psychology as a discipline, are two issues raised in the papers. There are several more, variously discussed by different authors. And of course individual authors also raise unique points. I will not try to summarise what they have all said, nor repeat in detail my own views. The most general matter, perhaps, concerns the nature of higher education, and what should be its aims. There is the question of whose interests, if any, should have priority, the main stakeholders being students (and parents), academics, employers and government. These interests are certainly not identical. Similarly, should the individual or society, however conceived, come first, or can the two be reconciled. A related question is whether higher education should be purely practical or vocational, or have some more general 'educational' aims. And is there something that ought to make higher education 'higher', rather than merely tertiary? Some papers suggest these might be in terms of social value, or of personal development.

Most seem to agree that first degrees should have at least some vocational relevance. Another group of questions thus concerns the actual employability of psychology graduates, and the extent to which degree courses fit them for employment, or ought to do so. This is particularly apposite given the fact that the large majority of graduates will not become professional psychologists, or even perhaps enter a related occupation. Several suggestions are made about increasing and emphasising the range of general skills that graduates might have to offer. There is also the matter of selling a psychology degree in the employment market place. Two aspects are the views of employers, and the presentation skills of graduates. It is suggested that in the first the BPS might play a more active role. In 1970, when the first A-level was introduced, there were officially 838 graduates in psychology. The numbers taking pre-degree courses are now, as Phil Banyard points out, over 180,000 a year, and degree-level courses must raise it to 200,000 or more. Yet the inaccuracy of the public image of psychology remains a matter of concern, as it has been as long as I can remember, and still is even in the USA (When I was a student, it was already alleged that if someone said they were a psychologist, they would get the reply, 'What's that?' In America the answer would be 'So am I'.)

This raises another issue, namely the content of psychology degrees. Again there are several aspects, for example whether they should be more oriented towards practical application, and the extent to which they should include other disciplines. An increasing number of institutions do offer combinations of psychology with other disciplines. This relates to the question of the GBR, which largely determines the Psychology part. Several authors give more or less an 'all right – but' verdict, the 'but' being in the direction of a wider and/or more flexible approach. I in fact suggested a range of possibilities, from the most radical course of doing away with GBR altogether (admittedly hardly a practical proposition even if desirable) to a modest requirement to include say one related module.

Then there is the matter of the relationship of degrees to other courses in psychology, above all A-level. There is of course some doubt over the whole future of A-levels, but whatever might replace them, much the

same issues would remain. They were in fact raised from the very start, though with the initially very small numbers (120 in 1970) there was not an immediate problem. The problem might be seen in Piagetian terms as a sort of vertical *dècalage*, that is the pattern repeats itself at a later stage. The questions are whether A-levels are suitable for progression to a degree in psychology (or indeed in something else), and whether they are a useful terminal qualification for those who do not go on to higher education at all. There is the long-running problem of some psychology undergraduates having the A-level while others do not, and the question as to whether it should be a requirement (probably neither popular nor practical), or whether degree courses should make special arrangements to accommodate two groups of students. And there is the suggestion that degree students with A-level might be better off without it, since what they have learned has to be unlearned or corrected. This too was said at the start. The answer surely is, not to institute an age limit, but to improve teaching at all levels. I do think, however, that there is a case for a better foundation for all degree work, with more emphasis on general skills and wider knowledge.

And this raises one more issue, which might be called 'psychology for all'. A case can be made for including psychology in all education at every level. Indeed, to use the useful distinction made by Graham Richards between 'psychology' the discipline, and 'psychology' the subject matter of that discipline, all education must necessarily include the latter. Learning, for example, must be intrinsic to education of any kind, and that is certainly psychology. But it is also psychology. It is not only teachers who can benefit from knowing how learning best occurs (though what teachers have been told has, in the past, often left much to be desired). Anyone learning (and it is hard to think of anyone who does not have to do so) can, in principle, do better with an understanding of practice, feedback, motivation and so on. Such things can be grasped, I venture to suggest, even in primary education, at least at the upper levels. A view which goes even further is the general applicability of psychology to everyday life – 'giving psychology away', as George Miller put it years ago. This would include such aspects as community psychology, personal and professional development, and coaching psychology (not equated with sports coaching of course), discussed in this issue. It can indeed be argued that psychology is, in principle and often in practice, relevant to virtually every aspect of life, from day-to-day interaction with others to major world problems of war, famine, disease and so on.

The general view of contributors here is optimistic, and I agree. But all these issues, and more, must continue to be debated, even if at times we seem to be in some sort of Looking-Glass World:

> *'Now here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!'*

I hope this issue of the *Review* may stimulate others to do so.

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