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Introduction

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Germany, psychology grew from a minor branch of philosophical doctrine into one of the central pillars of intellectual culture. In the process psychology's evidential basis, theoretical structure, forms of articulation, and status both as a scientific discipline and as a cultural phenomenon took on a recognisably modern form. It became a fixture in the curricula of German universities, a subject in public and academic debate, and a popular publishing phenomenon, with collections of case histories, journals, and factual and fictionalised life-histories appearing in ever increasing numbers. By the middle of the nineteenth century psychology was – if the pun can be forgiven – institutionalised.

My argument is that the rise of psychology had a significant impact on German literature and thought of the period. Indeed, it is hard to form a historically faithful picture of German intellectual and cultural life without an understanding of psychology's role in it. One of my reasons for writing this book was that students of the philosophy and literature of the period often seem not to appreciate the importance that the writers and thinkers they study attached to psychology. There is a failure, perhaps, to recognise just how aware these early moderns were of a subject that we tend to think of as belonging to our age and not theirs. My argument will be that the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had at their disposal some quite sophisticated means of conceptualising psychological states. Subsequent developments in psychology have made this hard to see; we have become used to talking about psychology in a language that was formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Consequently, when we try to read the writing and thought of an earlier period in psychological terms, the result is often anachronism. This might be the relatively harmless anachronism of using terms such as 'intuition', 'intelligence', and 'imagination' in ways that would not have been understood two hundred years ago. Or, more damagingly, earlier psychology is read as

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if it were merely unconceptualised psychoanalysis.¹ More cautious readers have reacted against the retrospective application of modern psychology, with results that can be damaging in a different way. In his study of Schiller, for instance, Emil Staiger argued that psychology was not a significant force in Schiller's writing.² Because Staiger disliked the retrospective application of psychoanalysis, he dismissed psychology *tout court*. Yet it was surely obvious in Staiger's day – and has since become even more so, thanks to the work of Wolfgang Riedel and Peter-André Alt – that the young dramatist Schiller was intensely interested in psychology.³ Part of my aim in this study is to show just how fully conceptualised the psychology of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers and thinkers was and so how unnecessary the retrospective application of psychoanalysis is.

This book presents a series of case studies in the interaction of psychology with literature and philosophy between 1700 and 1840. A complete account of the subject is well beyond the scope of a single study; instead I have chosen to show how some of the canonical writers and thinkers of the period assimilated and applied psychological ideas. It follows that part of my subject will be the emergence of psychology itself. One element of this book is a history of the evolution of psychology. I have largely confined myself to looking at the main theoretical developments in psychology. The history of how psychology became a discipline – the social and institutional history of psychology, if you like – forms the background to this study, but will remain largely invisible. The details of who practised psychology and where, how much they published and what form their publications took, what institutional status they had – these factors are of great interest, and much has been done in recent years to illuminate them. A picture has emerged of the confluence of initially isolated discourses, such as the autobiographical and devotional literature of German Pietism rediscovered by Hans-Jürgen Schings, followed by more integrated and institutionalised activity after 1750, first at the University of Göttingen, then in philosophical circles in Berlin, and then around 1800 at the University of Jena.⁴

The social and institutional context is of great importance, but it forms the background of this study, not its foreground. Our interest is in psychological *theory* – psychology's conceptual contents, not its social and institutional context. Some reference to the historical context and the detail of who drew on what sources is essential, of course, but this is not in the first place a study in 'bottom-up', contextualised history. Nor does it aim at completeness. I have chosen to look at individual works or

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historical moments, rather than attempt a complete account of a writer's knowledge and use of psychology. My aim is to show that psychology was important, not that it saturated every text. My evidence is a number of canonical works, which serve as test cases. My purpose in examining them has not been to provide an analysis – let alone a complete one – of a given author's handling of the psychology of his characters, but rather to consider representative instances of that author's awareness of, or contribution to, psychological theory. I am also aware of the danger of the kind of reductive reading that seeks to interpret a work through a single theme or from a single perspective. I only mean to argue that the psychological element must be built into readings of the works. Some omissions deserve explanation. All the writers and thinkers discussed in the following pages are men. I have made no attempt to redress this imbalance, not wishing to misrepresent an age in which philosophical and avant-garde literary discourse was overwhelmingly male. When gender issues arise, I have addressed these in an explicit and, I hope, conscientious way. Some important authors and texts have been omitted for reasons of space or in order to avoid unnecessary duplication. The former excluded Wezel, Tieck, and Jean Paul, the latter E. T. A. Hoffmann's novels. As this is a study of the period 1700 to 1840, I have not discussed or used Freudian or other psychoanalytical ideas. The only circumstance in which I could conceive of its being helpful to apply Freud's theories retrospectively would be if they could be shown to be true.

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CHAPTER I

The 'long past': psychology before 1700

THE 'LONG PAST' OF PSYCHOLOGY

It is not uncommon for histories of psychology to begin by quoting Hermann Ebbinghaus's dictum that psychology has 'a short history but a long past'.¹ This implies that until psychology became a science and acquired a history, it was uneventful. It suggests the long persistence of a stable paradigm, and in some respects it is true. It is indeed the case that from antiquity up to the nineteenth century most European philosophy of mind derived directly or indirectly from Aristotle's *De anima*. The underlying model of mind is a group of distinct faculties with a physiological basis, each located in a separate organ and each defined by its function. One can find evidence for this model as far back as the Homeric poems.² Given systematic and philosophical form by Aristotle, it became the standard model of mind and lasted well into the modern period. For instance, the belief, explicitly held by Aristotle and implicit in Homer, that humans share with animals all of their psychic faculties except for reason would have been accepted by most thinkers of the eighteenth century.³

The aim of this chapter is to identify the key features of psychology's long past. This will involve a brief summary of Aristotle's *De anima*, followed by an account of the fate of the much less influential Platonic tradition. Finally, to gain a sense of what an educated person around 1700 might have understood by 'psychology', we will consider how some important German, British, and French reference books presented the subject.

Aristotle

De anima deals chiefly with the biological aspect of soul.⁴ Later it would be used to provide answers to questions that were quite foreign to its intentions, in particular the Christian need to demonstrate the immortality of the soul. In fact, *De anima* presents the powers of the soul – motor

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powers, instincts, the emotions, sensation – as dependent on the body. Aristotle's key argument is that soul is the 'actuality' (*entelecheia*) of the body (412a16). It is what a body must be in order to carry out its functions. Aristotle compares this to vision: soul and body are to a person what seeing and pupil are to an eye (412b18–24). Soul is what a body is for, its purpose. In general, then, soul is the essence of body: the formal, efficient, and final causes of body converge in it (415b8 ff.). That is not to say that the soul is the person. Aristotle distinguishes between the person and his or her intellect. It is neither the person alone nor the intellect alone that thinks: rather a person thinks by means of the intellect (408b13–14).

Five different types of soul occur and each has different capacities (*dynameis*). The most basic form of soul has the powers of nutrition and growth (413a21–34). Plants have souls of this kind. The second type of soul has these powers plus sensation (413b1–10). This is the kind of soul that immobile animals have. The third type of soul has all the above plus desire. The fourth has the above plus movement: all mobile animals have this species of soul. The fifth type has the above plus 'intellect and the reflective capacity' (*nous kai hē theorētikē dynamis*, 413b24). In each case the higher soul comprises the lower. Thus, although the highest species of soul comprises a multiplicity of powers, it is also ultimately a unity, for the higher capacities contain the possibility of the lower (414b29–30).

Cognition begins when the senses receive the forms of external objects. The form of a thing imprints itself on the sense like a ring in wax; the imprint in the wax consists of the form of the ring, not the ring itself (424a18–23). The process of sensation itself is free of errors (418a31–33). When we see a white object, we cannot be wrong in sensing it is white (428b19–22). The power of the senses does vary, however, for it often happens that after a loud noise we are less able to hear (429a31–b2). Moreover, we can be wrong in imagining what the white thing is. We form an image (*phantasma*) of the thing in our imagination (431a16). We never think without these images. Imagination leads to error because it makes us susceptible to illusion (427b18–19). This is why when we sleep or when we are ill we do not perceive the world as it is; in these states we are governed by imagination (429a1–8).

Normally, the intellect (*nous*) is in control. Intellect is of two kinds. If, as seems to be the case, the mind can potentially think everything, then it must have no limitations and must therefore contain nothing but itself (429a18–21). In this sense the mind 'cannot have any nature of its own except just this, to be potential' (429a21–2). However, the intellect is also

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the location of forms. In this aspect – what Aristotle calls its ‘actualised’ state – the intellect takes on the form of what it is thinking about: ‘the intellect, in its actualised state, is the facts’ (431b17). The intellect’s capacities are potentially the forms of the objects themselves. The same is true of the senses. The sense of touch is the power to take on the forms of all touchable things (431b24 ff.).

Chapter 5 of *De anima* introduces a new idea, the productive (*poiētikos*) intellect. This provides a metaphysical grounding for intellect. Just as the potential intellect has the capacity to become things, so the intellect must also have the power to initiate things. This productive intellect is like light. Light enables coloured things to be coloured; without light, although they possess the same qualities, they are only potentially coloured. Similarly, the active intellect renders potential qualities actual. In its essence this power is ‘separated, unaffected, and unmixed, being in substance activity (*energeia*)’. Its action is constant. Unlike the potential intellect, which is affected, productive intellect is not. Though it perdures the destruction of the physical body, we have no memory of our pre-existence, because the productive intellect is unaffected. Here Aristotle appears to be thinking of Plato’s theory of *anamnēsis* or recollection, according to which the process of acquiring knowledge is in fact a recollecting of things hidden within us.⁵ The Platonic tradition of psychology coexisted and commingled with the dominant Aristotelian tradition from late antiquity onwards to varying degrees. Its main contributions were the notions of the duality of soul, the belief that the psyche is driven by desire, and the theory of *anamnēsis*, which can be seen as the source of the idea of the unconscious in European thought and is thus of considerable importance for our story.

The idea of the unconscious in the Platonic tradition

Although some elements of Plato’s psychology resemble Aristotle’s physiological faculty psychology, a quite different, dualist psychology appears in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Its central idea is *anamnēsis*.⁶ In the *Meno* this forms part of an argument about cognition. Socrates argues that we cannot find something if we do not know what to look for. The mind must in some way be pre-equipped for knowledge. Hence it is more true to speak of remembering than knowing. Our knowing is not a becoming acquainted by seeing sensible objects, for what we know is not in fact sensible particulars but the forms of things. An ideal principle in us knows or recollects these forms: the immortal soul. In the *Phaedo* Socrates

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defines soul as a substance that is entirely different and separate from the body, an idea that derives perhaps from Pythagorean cult beliefs.⁷ Soul can be hindered in exercising its powers of cognition by the body. Cognition involves separating thought from the sense organs. Only when the soul is apart from the body does it have intelligence (*phronēsis*).⁸ The soul is driven by eros, first bodily eros, then through release and purification from the body towards spiritual eros.⁹ Eros and reason (*logos*) are the constitutive forces of the soul. Both remind us of our prenatal contact with the world of ideas, before soul was imprisoned in body.

Late-Antique Neoplatonist psychology is an amalgam of Platonic and Aristotelian ideas, the former providing the structure and the latter much of the content. For Plotinus, the soul is independent of the body and immortal. As in Plato's *Timaeus*, it is divinely born (*theion gennēton*) and partakes in the universal world-soul. Individual souls are emanations from the universal soul. In this sense, there is only one soul, present everywhere in many bodies.¹⁰ It might be objected that if all souls were one, people should not differ in their knowledge. Plotinus answers that such differences occur because bodies are different, not souls. Even within one body, the different parts of the body have different experiences. This is because the body obscures the truth.

Humans are inhabitants of two worlds. The soul is situated at the point where the universal intellect and the individual bodily sensibility meet:

The operation of the Intellectual-Principle [*nous*] enters from above us as that of the sensitive faculty [*aisthēsis*] from below; the We is the soul at its highest, the mid-point between two powers [*dynamēis*], between the sensitive principle, inferior to us, and the intellectual principle superior.¹¹

Plotinus agrees with Plato that the soul is divided into rational and irrational parts.¹² The two parts of the soul are the 'intellectual' (*noētikos*) and the 'psychic' (*psychikos*). The *noētikos* is immortal, the *psychikos* is not. These two parts together consist of a further five parts corresponding to the five *dynamēis* of Aristotelian souls. The intellectual soul consists of 'a kind of unthinking activity', and *noēsis* itself. The psychic soul consists of three parts: *dianoia*, *aisthēsis*, and *physis*. *Physis* is the power of the unconscious, vegetative soul; *aisthēsis* that of the sensitive, animal soul; and *dianoia* the capacity for reasoning.¹³

The soul's power of *aisthēsis* apprehends sensible objects. The representations to which these give rise, however, are handled by another power, the *logizomenon*, which assesses and judges the representations coming from perception. The *logizomenon* can also judge the impressions

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(*typoi*, literally ‘blows’) that come down from *nous*. It has a middle position between sensation and intellect. Its role is liaison:

The reasoning-principle [*logizomenon*] in the Soul acts on the representations [*ta phantasmata*] standing before it as the result of sense-perception [*aisthēsis*]; these it judges, combining, distinguishing; or it may also observe the impressions [*typoi*], so to speak, rising from the Intellectual-Principle, and has the same power of handling these; and reasoning will develop to wisdom where it recognises the new and late-coming impressions (those of sense) and adapts them, so to speak, to those it holds from long before – the act which may be described as the soul’s reminiscence [*anamnēsis*].¹⁴

In this life we seek to strip away the matter from sensible particulars so as to reach ideas. This is sometimes conceived of as an upwards striving of the soul, but more often as a remembering of ideas already in our mind of which we are not conscious. And yet inasmuch as this involves stripping away the (obstructive) knowledge of sensible particulars, to learn is to forget.¹⁵

This leads to what one might fairly term the first theory of the unconscious. There are two states in which we can think whilst not being conscious of what we are doing. The first is in habitual actions, when we are not attentive to the world:

Circumstances, purely accidental, need not be present to the imaging faculty [*phantasia*], and if they do so appear they need not be retained or even observed, and in fact the impression [*typos*] of any such circumstance does not entail awareness [*synaisthēsis*]. Thus in local movement, if there is no particular importance to us in the fact that we pass through first this then that portion of air, or that we proceed from some particular point, we do not take notice, or even know it as we walk.¹⁶

In such situations we have unconscious instincts that guide us. This is unconscious in the sense of ‘not known’, and whilst it might be psychologically interesting, it is not philosophically significant. We are also unaware of our mental activity when concentrating intently on something. Plotinus cites the example of acts of great bravery, in which one is conscious of one’s objective but not of oneself:

And even in our conscious life we can point to many noble activities, of mind and of hand alike, which at the time in no way compel our consciousness [*praxeis . . . to parakolouthēin hēmas autais ouk ekhousai*: literally ‘actions that do not have us following along with ourselves’]. A reader will often be quite unconscious when he is most intent: in a feat of courage there can be no sense either of the brave action or of the fact that all that is done conforms to the rules of courage . . . So that it would even seem that consciousness tends to blunt the

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activities upon which it is exercised, and that in the degree in which these pass unobserved they are purer and have more effect, more vitality, and that, consequently, the Proficient arrived at this state has the truer fullness of life, life not spilled out in sensation but gathered closely within itself.¹⁷

This inwardness is a key to Plotinus' mysticism.¹⁸ If we can escape our consciousness of the actions we are performing, we will be better able to perform them, even if they are mental activities. The intellect may remain conscious of its object, but the person as a whole is not. This unconscious mental activity is like the movement of a mystic towards God. It embodies a tendency towards the fourth *hypostasis*, that of pure *nous*, in which the thinking subject becomes one with its object. Beyond that is the fifth *hypostasis*, the One, or the complete identity of self to itself.

The psychology of Platonism and Neoplatonism, obscured by Scholasticism in the Middle Ages, was rediscovered in the Renaissance by Marsilio Ficino and others. Broadly speaking, Ficino followed Plotinus' metaphysics of soul. There are five essences: the One, mind (the angels), soul (humans), quality (the forms of things in the world), and physical matter. Soul occupies a position between the earthly and the divine, and it partakes of both.¹⁹ Man also has five aspects, in which he imitates and brings together the Universe. Ficino emphasises the power of the human soul over nature: 'Man imitates all the works of divine nature and perfects, corrects and changes those of the inferior world.'²⁰ Man is therefore a smaller earthly version of God.²¹ With divine powers come divine aspirations. Humans can know sensible realities, but they quest for ultimate reasons that are beyond them. The result is disquiet ('inquietudo animi', I.i; vol. 1 p.38). This accounts in part for Ficino's interest in the figure of the melancholy genius from the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*.²² Humans are the most perfect and the most wanting of creatures, yet their very shortcomings turn out to constitute their true worth.²³ Inclination and inadequacy combine in desire. Humans experience both the presence and the absence of the desired object. Desire fires man's progress towards God.²⁴ Herein lies the dignity of man: his desire to ascend to the divine. Ficino's conception of love owes much to Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates imagines that the soul resembles a chariot. The charioteer represents the rational part of the soul (*nous*), struggling to keep control of two horses of opposed natures, one divine and one not:

The soul resembles the naturally joined power of a winged team [of horses] under its charioteer. The God's horses and charioteers are all of good nature and good stock, but all others have been cross-bred. As for us the charioteer does hold the reins, but one of the horses is of fair and good nature and of like stock and the other is of the opposite nature and stock. (*Phaedrus*, 246a5-b4)

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For Ficino it is love, not reason, that binds together the two aspects of the world. Through love the world of appearance strives towards the world of ideas.

The Neoplatonism of Ficino was a formative influence on the Cambridge Neoplatonist school led by Ralph Cudworth, with which we reach the threshold of the Enlightenment.²⁵ The immediate context of Cambridge Neoplatonism was the religious conflicts of the seventeenth century. It originated in the Latitudinarian response to Puritanical Calvinism and the restrictions on the Church of England during the Interregnum.²⁶ The ‘latitude-men’ objected to Calvinist pessimism, stressing instead the capacity of man for moral improvement and drawing their inspiration from classical ethics, especially Plato. Another philosophical difference between Florentine and Cambridge Neoplatonism was the influence of Descartes on the latter.²⁷ Cudworth was generally well disposed towards Descartes. He agreed with Descartes that bodies can only be known by the understanding and that all knowledge of bodies aspires to the status of physics. However, Cudworth believed that real knowledge involves the identity of knower and known. From this he drew the Cartesian conclusion that only knowledge of the self can count as certain.²⁸ It follows that perception and knowledge are two quite different processes with very different results.²⁹ However, Cudworth disliked Descartes’s dualism of matter and mind, which he believed made most of the mind material. He rejected Descartes’s view that animals are machines. Human mental behaviour is like that of animals in some respects: like animals humans have instincts, which are purposive and must therefore be essentially incorporeal.³⁰

Cudworth replaced Descartes’s dualism of mind and matter with a new dualism of activity and passivity. Sensation arises from the combination of the pressure of external objects on our senses and mind’s own vital, attentive energy.³¹ Because they contain a material element, sensations are not pure cognitions. Yet attentive consciousness is not the sum of the mind’s activity, as it was for Descartes; the soul is active even when we are not conscious. Accordingly, unconscious states such as dreaming are of great importance to Cudworth.³² Citing Plotinus’ argument that there can be thought without the unifying central focus of *synaisthēsis*, he uses this against ‘those philosophers . . . who make the essence of the soul to consist in cogitation’, by which he means Descartes.³³ This leads into an extended discussion of the mind’s unconscious ‘plastic power’ that recalls Plotinus: