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Classic Text No. 61

Excerpt from *Medicinische Psychologie oder Physiologie der Seele**

by Dr Rudolph Hermann Lotze

Introduction and translation by

G. E. BERRIOS**

*Hermann Lotze (1817–81) is a neglected figure in the history of psychiatry although it has been claimed that his early views were influential, for example, on the young Griesinger. Trained as a physician, psychologist and philosopher he saw better than many the impending epistemological crisis that was to affect disciplines such as psychology and medical psychology as they were being taken over by the natural sciences. The problem he endeavoured to resolve was double-headed. On the one hand, Lotze believed that the mechanisms proposed by physiology and other relevant natural sciences were essential to the explanation of human behaviour provided that its meaning and context were respected; on the other, he wanted to do away with mysterious (metaphysical) explanations such as 'vital force' which in his time were still popular in biology. The solutions he eventually offered can understandably be seen as a weak compromise and one which satisfied no one. Materialists à outrance such as Vogt, Büchner, Lange and Ribot though he was too 'metaphysical'; spiritualist philosophers believed that he had surrendered too much to biology. It is likely that Lotze remained, in fact, a metaphysician as can be ascertained by studying his concept of Seele (soul, mind) into which he packed enough furniture to make many believe that he was an idealist thinker. This paper discusses some of these issues and justifies the choice of classic text, namely, Lotze's illuminating Introduction to his book *Medicinische Psychologie oder Physiologie der Seele*.*

* Lotze (1852: 1–8).

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The medico-psychological ideas of R. H. Lotze have been neglected by historians of psychiatry.¹ This is the more surprising for directly and indirectly Lotze's philosophy was influential on nineteenth-century psychology and psychiatry.² Fashion remains a controlling factor in all walks of life, and one wonders whether Wittgenstein's jibe that Lotze 'shouldn't have been allowed to write philosophy' (Rhees, 1981: 120–1) might have dissuaded some from studying Lotze's writings.

The man

The son of an army surgeon, Rudolph Hermann Lotze was born on 21 May 1817 in Bautzen (currently located in the Free State of Saxony, Germany). After attending the Gymnasium of Zittau (to where the family had moved), Lotze read medicine, philosophy, psychology, physics and mathematics at Leipzig University where he became a disciple of E. H. Weber, W. Volckmann, G. T. Fechner and C. H. Weisse. Aged 24, he was made an 'instructor' at his university and published his *Metaphysik* (Lotze, 1841),³ which included a section on 'Psychology'. In 1842 his *Allgemeine Pathologie und Therapie als Mechanische Naturwissenschaften*⁴ appeared, and two years later he was appointed to J. F. Herbart's chair at Göttingen. In 1852 he published *Medicinisches Psychologie oder Physiologie der Seele*,⁵ perhaps his more important work on the philosophy of mind. Called to Berlin in 1881, he died from a chest infection on 1 July 1881, three months after taking up the chair (Pester, 1989). Lotze published a large number of works,⁶ but in the context of this introduction we shall refer only to that part of his work linking medicine, psychology and philosophy. One of his students and biographers, Rehnisch (1881), believed that Lotze's interest in philosophy had been encouraged by his love for poetry (which he wrote as a youngster). Rehnisch (1881) also suggested that Lotze's decision to read medicine was motivated by filial duty.

Lotze did not form a school of thought in the conventional sense of this term⁷ but during his lifetime and for a time after his death his ideas were influential within and outwith Germany. For example, W. Windelband, a well known neo-Kantian German philosopher, and also T. Mertz, W. Wundt, W. Dilthey, H. Rickert and M. Scheler were inspired by his ideas. Likewise, in 1870 James Ward, who was to become Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge (Campbell, 1927), attended his lectures at Göttingen and considered Lotze as his teacher.⁸ B. Bosanquet who edited and translated some of his work was also influenced by Lotze's ideas (Devaux, 1932). In the USA, those touched by Lotze's views included W. James (Kraushaar, 1940), J. M. Cattell (1928),⁹ J.

Royce (Cotton, 1954), and also G. Santayana (1971) who wrote his Harvard doctoral thesis on Lotze's philosophy.

Philosophical background

Lotze cannot be easily placed into any of the schools of philosophy reigning in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. Although he has often been characterized as a bridge-builder, on closer inspection his views are positive, determined and always have a clear objective. On the one hand, he realized the importance of the new epistemological approach offered by the natural sciences but had no truck with vitalism and the old metaphysics which still characterized biology during the 1840s. On the other, he thought and wrote within a specific religious space, and this limited his conceptual manoeuvring. We do not know what his final philosophical synthesis might have been (his untimely death prevented the completion of his work) but what he left behind should be read with attention by those working in disciplines which, like psychology and psychiatry, are conceptually hybrid.

Hybrid disciplines are those which have grown in the shadowy interstice or no man's land existing between the natural and human sciences. Their central questions are posed within a space of personalized semantics, for they concern meaning and reasons for human behaviour. History and fashion, however, have since the nineteenth century determined that to be complete their accounts must be linked with physical nature, that is, with the brain. Unfortunately, the systems of description and explanation which have since developed to study the latter are totally unable to handle meaning, in any real sense. All that one can hope for is the identification of statistical 'correlations' holding proxy variables together. The latter are chosen to 'represent' the two realms of meaning and brain. The problem is that the epistemology of proxyhood remains understudied, and in spite its popularity in current science it may not be sufficient to deal with the problem of the relationship between meanings and the brain.¹⁰ The problem is made worse by the fact that in the field of neuropsychiatry there is an increasing contempt for meaning. Whether due to conceptual insensitivity and impatience with ideas, ignorance, excessive 'pragmatic' drive or fashion, researchers believe that they can 'reduce' (the current term is 'naturalize') meaning by making it tantamount to a brain mechanism, *simpliciter*. The required return journey from the brain to meaning is no longer considered as needed. This was (in Lotze's time) and remains the central problem of the hybrid disciplines.

Lotze tried to resolve the problem by incorporating into the equation explanations provided by the natural sciences¹¹ and by resisting the acceptance of *prima facie* 'traditional' accounts¹² of life in general or the psyche in particular in terms of a 'vital force'.¹³ From this perspective, the conventional view that Lotze was too much of a scientist to accept idealism and too much of a spiritualist to allow a free reign to materialism and

mechanism is probably simplistic.¹⁴ The general aspects of Lotze's philosophy have been well studied (Hartmann, 1888; Jones, 1895; Pfleiderer, 1884; Santayana, 1971; Stählin, 1889; Sullivan, 1998; Thomas, 1921; etc.).

Between 'soul' and 'mind'

Central to Lotze's philosophy is the notion of *Seele*.¹⁵ Without understanding the ontological and epistemological role played by this concept in Lotze's philosophy of mind it is difficult to assess his contribution to psychology and psychiatry. The way in which Lotze's ideas were viewed during the second half of the nineteenth century is more important to the historian of psychiatry than the exegesis of today. This is because such early interpretations influenced the formulation of those psychiatric concepts which still govern psychiatry in our own time. Twenty-first-century philosophical views of Lotze's work, important as they may be, are more relevant to the history of philosophy¹⁶ than that of psychiatry.

As Krestoff (1890) has shown, with Lotze the term 'soul' loses much of its mystical and religious meaning (for example, it is no longer related to the issue of immortality). A polysemic German term (Grimm and Grimm, 1971), *Seele* can only be adequately translated if the context and the writer's intentions (both avowed and unavowed) are taken into account.¹⁷ Lotze made good use of the various meanings of *Seele*, and on account of this his usage has been considered as 'transitional', i.e., as meaning neither 'soul' (in the religious way) nor 'mind' in the psychological one.¹⁸

Villa (1903: 34) captured this well:

The material processes according to Lotze are only symbols which, being translated by the soul into a language proper to itself, produce sensations. The latter constitute the material upon which the higher mental faculties exert their activity, manifesting themselves even in the absence of any concomitant cerebral phenomenon. The material processes are not the cause, but the effect of mental processes . . .

If this interpretation sounds too biased towards idealism, Wentscher (1915: 148) himself wrote:

Souls themselves, however, were likewise conceived as 'actions of the world-ground' but as specially distinguished by their admirable and at bottom inexplicable capacity of feeling and knowing themselves as the active centres of an out-flowing life

And so did Windelband (1958: 644):¹⁹

His own attitude [Lotze's] is best characterized by its conception of knowledge as a vital and purposive interaction between the soul and the other 'substances'. The 'reaction' of the soul is combined with the excitation which proceeds from 'things'. On the one side, the soul develops its own

nature in the forms of perception, and in the general truths which come to consciousness with immediate clearness and evidence on the occasion of the stimulus from things; on the other hand, the participation of the subject makes the world of ideas a phenomenal appearance

The translation

In the translation which follows, Lotze (1852) listed the problems that he was going to deal with in the rest of the book. For example, he distinguishes between practical and scientific psychology, the former dealing with the same problems currently debated under the rubric 'Folk Psychology' (e.g., Christensen and Turner, 1993; Stich, 1983). Lotze believed that scientific psychology had a deeper understanding of man than practical psychology for it possessed knowledge of underlying mechanisms and powers. The latter went beyond reasons or meanings for behaviour to capture 'causes', a concept which is fully meaningful only in terms of a biological, mechanistic, substratum of behaviour. Lotze seemed to prefer a model of science fully based on the epistemological structure taken of the natural sciences, that is one in which, on the basis of general principles or foundations, many theoretical inferences and empirical hypotheses could be drawn. Predicting the future on the basis of a limited amount of observations was not sufficient according to Lotze, and this is why practical psychology could never be a real science. Lotze was writing at a time when statistics and probability were not yet providing the epistemological basis of discovery and justification in science and hence needed another evidential basis. He felt that these bases could not be provided by induction alone and he struggled hard to find an alternative. His mind was deep enough, however, to realize that science is practised by people, and that culture remains the medium in which all scientific narratives take place: 'We shall not lose sight of the fact that there are cultural elements (*Elementen der Bildung*) which from outside physiology govern the thinking of all human beings and which as a person and as a professional the scientist ignores at his peril' (Lotze, 1852: 8).

Notes

1. An important exception is Verwey, 1985.
2. Flugel (1964: 70) wrote:

His most influential work on psychology was, however, his *Medicinische Psychologie*, published in 1852. In this book he stressed the view, as Bain did three years later, that the mind and the nervous system must be studied in relation to one another. At the same time he held that physiology could never afford an explanation of the mind – a position which, as Murphy remarks, seems a common place to us today, but which was perhaps a wise admonishment at a time when the rapid growth of knowledge on the physiological side was beginning to prove a little intoxicating to the materialistically minded. To Lotze also belongs the credit of being among the first to realize the importance for human psychology of the study of the animal mind and of abnormal conditions . . .

On the influence of Lotze on Griesinger, one of the most quoted writers in the history of psychiatry, see Wahrig-Schmidt, 1985.

3. An English rendition (1887) is available. The general editor was Bernard Bosanquet and translators included T. H. Green, C. A. Whittuck, A. C. Bradley, J. C. Wilson.
4. As far as I know there is no English translation of this work.
5. As far as I know there is no English translation of this work, one of his last psychological/medical writings.
6. See Santayana, 1971.
7. Külpe (1913: 172) wrote: 'Lotze did not found a real school. For this he lacked a closed system, which elaborated by prophetic fantasy, could answer the bold and persistent demands of the intellect'.
8. A. H. Murray (1937: 147), in his excellent book, calls Lotze 'Ward's philosophical father'.
9. 'It was my privilege to hear the last course of lectures on psychology by Lotze given at Göttingen in the winter semester of 1880–81' (Cattell, 1928).
10. For a discussion of the problem of proxyhood, see Berrios and Marková, 2002a.
11. Lotze (1885: 72) cannot accept that inert matter by itself can generate the spirit, and posits the existence of a peculiar form of matter which might:

A materialist, therefore, which assumed that a spiritual life could spring out of simply physical conditions or motions of bodily atoms would be an empty assumption, and, in this form, has hardly ever been advocated in earnest. The materialistic views which have really had adherents have proceeded from the premise that what we call matter is really better than it externally appears. It contains in itself the fundamental peculiarity out of which the spiritual conditions may develop just as well as physical predicates.

(For a further discussion of the plain versus baroque concepts of matter and their relationship to the mind, see Berrios and Marková, 2002b.) At the end of the nineteenth century, the problem of how matter can generate mind was reanalysed in terms of 'emergent evolution' (Morgan, 1900), and during the second half of the twentieth century as the process of 'supervenience' (Kim, 1993).

12. Lotze's views on popular accounts of human behaviour, nowadays discussed under the heading of 'Folk Psychology', are worth reading in detail. The translation that follows mentions his views briefly.
13. Lotze is conventionally described as the philosopher who dealt the *coup de grâce* to the concept of vital force (e.g., Schnädelbach, 1984; for a general background to the debate, see Gregory, 1977).
14. This is the way, for example, in which Ribot (1879: 75) characterizes his position: 'Lotze can be considered as one of the main representatives of the doctrine called in Germany *Idealrealismus*, a term applied to those who maintain an intermediate position between idealism and realism'. In this same regard, a contemporary commentator has called Lotze the 'last of the natural metaphysicians' (Reed, 1997)
15. Like soul in English or *l'âme* in French, this term can be variously translated into English according to historical period and according to whether the interpreter takes a religious (soul), psychological (mind) or philosophical perspective (self, spirit). All in all, the most apposite translation is likely to be 'mind'.
16. The historiography of philosophy is complex and remains an unresolved problem. In general, Anglo-Saxon histories of philosophy tend to be less historically contextualized than Continental ones. In an excellent article Passmore (1966) identified six methods in terms of which the history of philosophy can be written: polemical, doxographical, history as the passage of truth, classificatory, cultural, and problem-centred. Windelband's (1958) book is a good example of the 'problem-centred' approach.

17. On this, see the superb analysis by Balibar, 2004.
18. On Lotze's view on the 'empirical self', see the illuminating discussion by Woodward, 1977.
19. This book includes a suggestive section entitled 'The controversy over the soul' where Windelband (1958) puts forward an interesting explanation for the transformation of the old notion of soul into that of mind.

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Excerpt from *Medicinische Psychologie oder Physiologie der Seele*

by Dr Rudolph Hermann Lotze

Since antiquity, natural observation has considered an acute attack of illness to be preferable to a long lasting, chronic one. A strong shock, sufficient to disturb our state of normality, either kills us or provokes a

* This is a translation of the introductory section of Lotze, R. H. (1852) *Medicinische Psychologie oder Physiologie der Seele* (Leipzig: Weimann), 1–8.

prompt, equally strong reaction. Minor disorders, on the other hand, undermine life for they are not strong enough to trigger an adequate bodily defence. It has been plausibly claimed that the same applies to matters spiritual: indeed, not only to our psychological life but also to our efforts to search for the truth. Garnering knowledge piecemeal and at a time of life when we cannot yet discern, is beneficial neither to the march of science nor to individual progress. However, when met with at an optimal time of cultivation and experience, facts can be fully understood and learned. If too late or desultorily presented the same facts elicit only slow and superficial learning. This happens because dispersed impressions never achieve the force to stimulate bold responses.

This explains why knowledge of the mental (*Erkenntnis des Seelenlebens*) has grown at a slower pace than that of other sciences. In the area of the mental we seem unable to organize in a scientific manner the profound experiences we have access to. From childhood, interactions with our surroundings (*Umgebung*) offer us the possibility of making countless observations about the way in which our mind works. However, obeying our instinctual knowledge we only extract from such manifold of experiences those which are of practical relevance to us. The scientific attitude that would cause us to ponder over first causes cannot compete with the growth of our practical intelligence. In each individual, this practical purview of the mental is thus recreated anew. Gaps in the manifold of experience are then filled by psychological observations borrowed from history and art. This practical human knowledge (*Menschenkenntnis*), however, does not constitute a science of the mind nor can it become one.

Science endeavours to explain the origin and mechanisms of experiences rather than just extract practical guidelines, so the general observations that reflective persons extract from their rich mental life cannot be considered as scientific. Ideally, the guidelines themselves should be based on the observation of numerous mental phenomena; given the state of incompleteness of the science of the mind, however, such guidelines are inferred from a small number of experiences. They work because behaviour can often be predicted in practice by just applying a formula inferred from repeated observation showing that some cause is often followed by some effect; indeed, such a formula does not need to include deep knowledge about the mechanisms that underlie the connection between causes and effects. Besides, the formula in question is not meant to be infallible for randomness is in fact part of the way we relate to events in the world. This is why incomplete observations suffice in practical life.

Our knowledge of mankind is uncertain and few expect that such a practical approach will ever be fully replaced by true science. The mind (*Seele*) remains impenetrable whether to the teacher who wants to shape it, the doctor who wants to cure it from a mental disorder, or the spiritual tutor who wants to guide it out of a moral dilemma. The interesting point here is that all three experts perform with instinctive assurance (*instinctiver Sicherheit*)

and deal effectively with a variety of human events (*Ereignisse*) which in themselves are so complex that they escape the understanding and control of science. Although repeated observation tells them how the mind works, they still cannot answer an all important question, namely, what elementary forces provide the energy and binding power to make behaviour possible? Based on the intuitions of the human heart and vignettes of life carried by the classical literature, our century has accepted certain views about the human mind and considered them as forming part of empirical psychology. This in spite of the fact that such views, when divested of their seductive garb, appear as totally insufficient to constitute a true science of the mind.

This mental life (*geistige Dasein*) of which we only know its manifestations rather than its foundations has for a long time been the object of scientific interest. Efforts to understand it have been hampered by the rush with which each generation tries to reach its own conclusions based upon a small number of facts and by the fact that some of the essential components of mental life are studied by the natural sciences which, as it is known, have developed late in our culture. However, the current lack of success should not discourage researchers from believing that they will eventually achieve something. Not that we should attribute to ourselves higher mental powers than those of our predecessors; simply that the progress in the natural sciences witnessed this century is extraordinary and may better guide the way we ask and deal with certain questions.

The real threat to knowledge does not come from a fundamental obscurity of the subject matter of the mind but from the fate to which all psychological theories seem subjected, namely, that our familiarity with human nature and with the contents of our awareness encourages us to believe that we know it all already and that science can add nothing to this knowledge. But like all notions derived from our personal experience those relating to our inner life are also grounded on a simplistic metaphysics (*unfertigen Metaphysik*). Based upon these old observational habits and with less judgement than sense, we are prone to use our prejudices to oppose the just claims that the more reflective observers of human behaviour tend to make. Hypotheses that appear clear and useful to common sense may be found to be false by philosophical analysis, whereas questions which to the superficial eye appear as insoluble can be fully resolved by science. Currently, the situation is such that while questions in the physical world can be resolved on the basis of incontrovertible principles those in the realm of the mind cannot because there is a lack of foundations. This allows a free rein where each person follows his own fantasies and decides according to his character, nature and capacities.

We must thus remind ourselves that psychology, like the rest of the sciences, includes questions which remain unresolved and on which only opinions can be expressed. Like the other sciences, however, psychology should be based on general principles. The skill of those researching in physiology resides in developing such principles and extracting important

practical consequences. As far as constructing the principles themselves, however, those researchers are no different from simple students.

We shall inquire into the relationship between mind and body (*geistigen und des körperlicher Lebens*) inasmuch as it illuminates the therapeutic endeavour. We hope that this practical objective will help our readers to persevere. Due to so many fruitless attempts to resolve it, the subject of our interest has lost much of its freshness. In the midst of this confusion and falsity, we will present those ideas which we consider as correct and capable of further development. Our truth will be different from the extreme and whimsical views (*extremen und capriciösen Ansichten*) currently put forward to reanimate the subject at hand. On the one hand, our explanation of the mechanisms of the mind will agree with what the natural sciences have to say; and on the other it will steer clear of all ethical and religious questions which have their own rightful and autonomous place in the science of the mind. We shall put together the general principles that so far have been obtained by means of psychological research without taking sides or becoming committed to any specific philosophical language or school. When doing so, however, we shall not lose sight of the fact that there are cultural elements (*Elementen der Bildung*) which from outside physiology govern the thinking of all human beings and which as a person and as a professional the scientist ignores at his peril.