# APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

## Pope Pius XII

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*Address of His Holiness to the Rome Congress of the International Association of Applied Psychology, April 10, 1958.*

Having come from all over the world to attend the 13th Congress of the International Association of Applied Psychology, you have wished, gentlemen, to take this occasion to visit Us. We are happy to receive you here and We wholeheartedly welcome each one of you.

The subject which interests you and from which the present Congress derives its name is applied psychology: but without limiting your research only to practical applications you also take into sizable consideration questions relating to theoretical psychology.

This appears from the abundant documentation which you have submitted to Us on the four sections into which your work is divided: psychology applied to labor and professional orientation, medical psychology, scholastic psychology and criminal and penitentiary psychology. Each part deals on many occasions with questions of deontology involved in these matters.

You have also observed that in this respect there exist certain differences of opinion between psychologists and theologians which give rise to regrettable uncertainties in ideas and actions and you have requested Us to give clarification insofar as possible.

Two points especially have been brought to Our notice: the widespread use of certain tests[1] by which one goes so far as to delve unscrupulously into the intimate depths of the soul, and the related, but larger problem, of the moral responsibility of the psychologist, that of the extent and limitations of his rights and of his duties in the use of scientific methods, whether in theoretical research or in practical application.

We will deal with these two points in our survey, by embodying them within the framework of a greater synthesis: the religious and moral aspects of the human personality and the object of psychology. We will take the following points into consideration:

1) The definition of human personality from the psychological and moral point of view;

2) The moral obligations of the psychologist in relation to the human personality;

3) The fundamental moral principles related to the human personality and to

psychology.

## I—THE DEFINITION OF THE HUMAN PERSONALITY FROM THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL POINT OF VIEW

1) The expression "personality" is found today almost everywhere but with different meanings. It is, in fact sufficient to glance through the abundant bibliography on the subject to realize that many of the concepts regarding the psychic structure of man are expressed in technical terms which in every case preserve the same fundamental meaning; yet several elements of human psyche are still badly described and have not yet been given an adequate definition. The terminology "personality" is one of them in scientific psychology as in applied psychology.

It is therefore important that We should specify Our interpretation of it. Though We take into account above all the moral and religious aspects, whereas you stop principally at the psychological one, We do not believe that these different points of view should engender oppositions or contradictions, as long as they remain objective and endeavor to keep to the facts.

We define personality as "the psychosomatic unity of man insofar as it is determined and governed by the soul."

2) This definition refers first of all to the personality as a "unity" because it is considered as a whole, of which the parts, though preserving their specific characteristics, are not separated but are organically linked between themselves. This is why psychology can take equally into consideration the psychic faculties and their functions separately from the point of view of their individual structure and their immanent laws, as well as from the point of view of their organic whole.

The definition then describes that unity as "psychosomatic." The opinions of the theologian and of the psychologist meet here on many points. In fact the technical works on psychology examine in detail the influence of the body over the mind to which it brings continued energies through its vital processes; a study is also made of the influence of the mind over the body. These studies endeavor to determine scientifically the modalities of the control of psychic tendencies by the spiritual soul and to draw from them practical applications.

The definition then asserts that the psychosomatic unity of man is "determined and governed by the soul." The individual, insofar as he is a unity and indivisible totality, constitutes a unique and universal center of being and of action, an "I" which has self- control and is the master of itself. This "I" is the same in all psychic functions and remains the same despite the passage of time.

The universality of the "I" in extent and duration applies particularly to the causal

bond which links it to its spiritual activities. This universal and permanent "I," under the influence of internal or external causes consciously perceived or implicitly accepted, but always by free choice, acquires a definite attitude, and a permanent character, both in its interior being and in its external behavior.

Since this specific character of the personality is ultimately derived from the spiritual soul, one describes it as being "determined by the soul," and, since it is not the case of an occasional process but of a continuous process, one adds "governed by the soul."

It can happen that certain traits of a character acquire greater prominence and that this is described with the word "personality," but the existence of these predominant characteristics is not necessary to be able to speak of a personality in the terms of the definition.

Personality can be considered either as a simple fact or in the light of moral values which must govern it. It is a fact that there are worthwhile personalities and others which are insignificant. Some are confused, vicious or depraved, others are open, forthright and honest. But both have these characteristics because they have adopted by free decision this or that spiritual orientation. Neither psychology nor morals will disregard this fact, even though both prefer to take into account the ideal to which the personality tends.

3) Since the moral and religious aspect coincide to a great extent with the former, it will be sufficient for Us to add a few indications. Metaphysics considers man in his ultimate end. It studies him as a living being, gifted with intelligence and freedom, in which the body and the soul are united in one single nature with an independent existence Technically one would refer to *rationalis naturae individua substantia* (cfr. S. Th. Ip.

Q29, a.1). In this respect, man is always a person, an "individual" distinct from all others an "I" from the very first to the very last second of his life, even when he is not conscious of it. There is, therefore, a certain difference between this point of view and the utterances of psychology, but, nevertheless, there are no unsolvable contradictions.

The most important traits of the personality from the moral and religious points of view are the following:

a) Man is entirely the work of the Creator. Even though psychology does not take this into account in its researches, in its experiments and clinical applications, it is always on the work of the Creator that it labors; this consideration is essential from the religious and moral point of view, but as long as the theologian and the psychologist remain objective, no conflict need be feared, and both can proceed in their own fields according to the principles of their science.

When one considers man as the work of God, one discovers in him two important characteristics for the development and the value of the Christian personality: his resemblance to God, derived from the act of creation, and his divine sonship in Christ made manifest by Revelation.

In fact, Christian personality becomes incomprehensible if one neglects these points and psychology, especially applied psychology, also lays itself open to misunderstandings and errors if it disregards them. For these facts are not imagined or assumed, but real. That they are known through Revelation does not in any way detract from their authenticity, because Revelation calls upon man to exceed the boundaries of limited intelligence and to let himself be drawn by the infinite intelligence of God.

b) The question of finality is equally essential from the religious and moral point of view. Man has the possibility and duty to perfect his nature, not as he himself understands it but according to the divine plan. In order that he may achieve the image of God in his personality, he must not follow his instincts but the objective norms, such as those of medical deontology which assert themselves on his intelligence and on his will and which are dictated by his conscience and by Revelation.

Conscience will in fact be enlightened by consulting the opinion of others and the traditional wisdom of humanity. A few years ago a code of medical deontology called *Ethical Standards for Psychologists*, and based on the answers of 7,500 members of the American Psychological Association (Washington, D. C.), was compiled in America.

Though this code may contain certain questionable assertions, one must approve the idea which inspires it: namely the recourse to serious and competent people to formulate and discover moral norms. Whoever neglects or scorns the norms of a moral objective order, will only acquire a deformed and imperfect personality.

c) On the other hand, to say that man is committed to observe certain rules of morality is tantamount to holding him responsible, to believe that he has the objective and subjective possibility to act according to these rules.

This affirmation of responsibility and liberty is also essential to personality. One cannot, therefore, despite certain opinions defended by a few psychologists, abandon the following principles, with regard to which it would be desirable that an agreement as broad as possible be achieved between psychologists and theologians.

1) Any man must be considered normal until there is proof to the contrary.

2) The normal man does not have a theoretical freedom alone but

enjoys the real use of it.

3) When the normal man puts to proper use the spiritual energies at his disposal, he is capable of surmounting the difficulties which hinder his observation of moral law.

4) Abnormal psychological tendencies are not always constraining and do not always deprive the subject of all possibilities of acting freely.

5) Even the dynamisms of the unconscious and of the subconscious are not irresistible; there are still great possibilities for mastering them, particularly for the normal subject.

6) The normal man is therefore ordinarily responsible for the decisions he makes.

d) Finally, in order to understand the personality one cannot disregard the eschatological aspect. As long as man lives on earth he can wish either good or evil, but once the soul has been separated from the body by death, it remains fixed in the dispositions acquired during life.

From the moral and religious point of view, the decisive element in the structure of personality is precisely the attitude which it adopts with regard to God and the ultimate end set for it by its very nature. If it has been oriented toward Him, it remains so; if, on the contrary, it has departed from this road, it will retain the disposition which it voluntarily acquired. For psychology, this last stage of the psychic future can be but of a secondary nature. But, since it is concerned with the psychical structures and with the resulting acts which contribute to the final development of the personality, psychology should not be totally indifferent to the destiny of the latter.

These are the points We wished to develop regarding the subject of personality, viewed from the moral and the religious point of view. Let Us add a few brief observations.

The works of your specialty also deal with the predominances in the structure of the personality, that is to say, with the tendencies which determine the aspects of its psyche. You thus divide men into groups, according to whether their predominant traits are the senses, the instincts, the emotions and the affections, sentiment, will, intelligence. Even from the religious and moral point of view, this classification is not without importance, because the reactions of the various groups to moral and religious motives is often different.

Your publications also often deal with the question of character. The distinction and the meaning of the concepts of the "character" and of the "personality" are not

uniform everywhere. One sometimes even goes so far as to consider them synonymous. Certain persons claim that the principal element of the character is the attitude which man adopts with regard to his responsibility; for others, it is his attitude toward values.

The personality of the normal man is necessarily confronted with the values and norms of moral life which, as We have said, also includes medical deontology; these values are not simple indications but compulsory directives. One must adopt an attitude in regard to them and accept them or refute them. This explains how a psychologist defines the character as "the relative coefficient of the personal search for, appreciation and acceptance of values." Many works of your Congress allude to this definition and even comment on it widely.

One last fact which attracts the common interest of the psychologist and of the theologian is the existence of certain personalities the only constant of which is, one might say, inconstancy. Their superficiality seems invincible and, with regard to anything of real value, admits as values only thoughtlessness or indifference. For the psychologist and for the theologian this does not constitute grounds for discouragement, but rather a stimulant to work and an invitation to a fruitful collaboration toward the formation of authentic personalities and of strong characters for the welfare of individuals and communities.

## II—THE MORAL OBLIGATIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST REGARDING THE HUMAN PERSONALITY

We now reach the questions of medical deontology, of which you have asked Us the solution, that is to say, first concerning the licitness of certain techniques and the manner of applying certain psychological tests, then regarding the principles of a religious and moral order which are fundamental for the psychologist and the patient.

We will in this respect observe that the questions of deontology dealt with here also concern anyone who has the faculty of reasoning and, in a general way, anyone capable of making a conscious psychic act.

Tests and other psychological methods of investigation have contributed enormously to the knowledge of the human personality and have been of considerable service to it.

One might then think that there does not exist in this domain any particular problem of medical morals and that everything can be approved without reservation. No one will in fact deny that modern psychology in general deserves approval from the religious and moral point of view.

But, if one takes into consideration specifically its objectives and the means which psychology uses to achieve them, one will be led to make a distinction. Its

objectives, that is to say the scientific study of human psychology and the healing of psychic diseases only deserve praise; but the means used sometimes give grounds for justifiable reservations, such as We mentioned previously concerning the publication in America of the work "Ethical Standards for Psychologists."

The best psychologists are aware of the fact that the most clever use of existing methods does not succeed in penetrating the area of the psyche which constitutes, one might say, the center of the personality and which always remains a mystery. At this point, the psychologist cannot but acknowledge with modesty the limitations of his possibilities and respect the individuality of the man on whom he must pass judgment; he should strive to perceive the divine plan in every man and help develop it insofar as it is possible. Human personality with its specific characteristics is in fact the most noble and wondrous work of creation.

Now, to whomever takes cognizance of your works, it would appear that certain moral problems arise here: you reveal in fact several times the objections raised against the intrusion of the psychologist into the intimacy of the personalities of other beings.

Thus for instance the use of Narco-synthesis, already questioned in psychotherapy, is considered illicit in legal proceedings as well as the use of the instrument for the detection of lies, known as "Lie-detector" or "polygraph."[2]

One author will denounce the harmful consequences of violent emotive tensions, provoked in a subject for experimental reasons, but he will also affirm that preference should be given to the interest of scientific progress over that of the individual person who serves as subject for the experiment.

Some in psychiatric research and treatment carry out intrusions without the previous consent of the patient, or without the patient being aware of their exact bearing. And the revelation of the real elements of their personality can, in the case of some people, provoke serious traumatisms.

In short, it can be said that one must sometimes deplore the unjustified intrusion of the psychologist in the depths of the personality and the serious psychic harm resulting therefrom to the patient and even to third parties.

It sometimes happens that the complete consent of the interested person is not secured, and that in order to justify disputable proceedings the priority of science over moral values and over the interests of the individuals (in other words the priority of the common good over the individual good) is alleged.

We are, therefore, going to examine the value of the principles which even good psychologists invoke to Justify certain disputable proceedings.

## 1) The Interest of Science and the Importance of the Psychologist

Moral law teaches that scientific demands do not by themselves alone justify the indiscriminate use of psychological techniques and methods, even by serious psychologists and for useful objectives.

The reason for this is that people concerned with the processes of psychological investigation must take into account not only scientific laws, but also transcendant norms. In fact, the primary question is not psychology itself and its possible progress but the human person who applies it and who obeys high social, moral and religious norms.

The same also holds true for the other branches of science; mathematics, for instance, or physics are in themselves alien to morals and therefore do not come under these norms, but the person who dedicates himself to their study and applies their laws is never removed from the moral field, because at no time does his free action cease to prepare his transcendent destiny.

Psychology as a science can only make its demands prevail insofar as the echelon of values and higher norms to which We have referred and which includes right, justice equity, respect of human dignity, and well ordered charity for oneself and for others, is respected. There is nothing mysterious in these norms. They are clear for any honest conscience and are formulated by natural reasoning and by Revelation. Inasmuch as they are observed, there is nothing to prevent the just demands of the science of psychology in favor of modern methods of investigation from being asserted.

## 2) The Consent of the Subject

The second principle under discussion is that of the rights of the person who lends himself to psychological experiments or treatments. In itself, the contents of the psyche is the exclusive property of the person himself (here regarding experiments and treatments) and is known only to him. But he already reveals something of it by his behavior.

When the psychologist concerns himself with what has been thus revealed, he does not violate the intimate psyche of the patient. He can also act with complete freedom when the patient consciously expresses a part of it and thereby indicates that he attaches no importance to the secret. But there is a considerable part of his interior world that a person reveals only to a few confidants and which he defends against the intrusion of others.

Certain matters will be kept secret at all cost from everyone, no matter whom. And then there are other matters which he could not bring himself to consider.

Psychology also shows that there exists a region of the intimate psyche—

particularly tendencies and dispositions— concealed to such an extent that the individual will never know of them or even suspect their existence. And in the same way as it is illicit to take what belongs to others or to make an attempt against a person's corporal integrity without his consent, neither is one allowed to enter his interior domain without his permission, whatever may be the techniques or methods used.

But one can also ask whether the consent of the patient is sufficient to give the psychologist unlimited access to his psyche.

If the consent is unfairly extorted, all action on the part of the psychologist will be illicit; if it is impaired by lack of freedom (due to ignorance, to error or to deception) all attempts to penetrate the depths of the soul will be immoral.

But if consent is given freely, the psychologist can in the majority of cases, but not always, act according to the principles of his science without contravening any moral norms. One must ascertain whether the interested person has not overstepped the limits of his competence and capacity in giving a valid consent.

Man, in fact, does not have an unlimited power over himself. Often in your works one quotes (without, however, giving the formula) the juridical principal: *volenti non fit injuria*: there is no injustice done to the person who consents.

Let Us first of all observe that the intervention of the psychologist might well injure the rights of a third party, for instance through the revelation of secrets (of state, of office, of family or of confession), or simply the rights of individuals or communities to their reputations.

It does not suffice that the psychologist himself or his assistants are sworn to secrecy, or that a secret can be entrusted sometimes to a cautious person for serious reasons.

Because, as We already pointed out in Our address of April 13,1953, on psychotherapy and psychology, there are certain secrets which absolutely cannot be revealed, not even to one cautious person.

As for the principle *volenti non fit injuria* it puts only one obstacle in the way of the psychologist, namely, the right of the person to protect his interior world. But there may be other obstacles which continue to exist by virtue of moral obligations and which the subject involved cannot suppress at his pleasure: religiousness, self-respect, chastity and decency for instance.

In this case, though he does not violate any right, the psychologist is wanting morally.

One must therefore examine with regard to each specific case whether one of these

reasons of moral order is not opposed to his intervention and their bearing must be accurately estimated.

**3) Heroic Altruism**

What must one think of the motive of heroic altruism invoked to justify the unconditional application of psychological techniques of exploration and treatment?

The moral value of human action depends in the first place on its object. If this is immoral the action is also immoral; it is of no use to invoke the motive behind it or the aim pursued. If the object is indifferent to good, one can then question the motives or the end which confer new moral values on the action. But however noble a motive may be, it can never render an evil action good.

Thus, any psychological intervention must be examined from the point of view of its object in the light of the given indications. If this object is not in line with right and morals, the motive of heroic altruism does not make it acceptable: if the object is licit, a higher moral value in addition to the motive invoked, can be attributed to the action.

People who, urged by this motive, offer themselves for the most painful experiments so as to help others and be useful to them deserve admiration and should be imitated. But one must be wary of confusing the motive or the aim of the action with its object and of transferring to the latter a moral value which it does not deserve.

**4) The General Interest and the Intervention of the Public Authorities**

Can the general interest and the intervention of the public authorities authorize the psychologist to use just any method?

No one can deny that the public authorities can, with regard to individuals and for just motives, put to advantage the proven acquisitions and methods of psychology. But here the question reverts to the choice of certain techniques and methods.

A characteristic trait of the totalitarian states is to give no thought to the means employed but to use indiscriminately all that serves the aim pursued without any regard for the exigencies of moral law. We already have denounced in Our speech of October 3, 1953, to the Sixth International Congress of Criminal Law the aberrations still sadly displayed by the 20th Century in its acceptance of torture and violence in judiciary proceedings.

The fact that immoral procedures are imposed by the public authorities does not in any way make them legal. Therefore, when the public authorities create experimental or consulting offices, the principles which We have described apply to all the steps of a psychological order that they may have to take.

Insofar as the free researches and initiatives of these offices are concerned, the principles applicable to free research and individual initiatives and to the use of theoretical and applied psychology in general will be enforced.

As regards the competence of the public authority to impose psychological examinations, the general principles concerning the limitations of the competence of the public authority will be applied. In Our speeches of September 13, 1952, on the moral limitations of medical research and treatment (Discourses and Radio messages Vol.

XIV, pages 320-325) and of September 30, 1954, to the *Solidalitas medicorum universalis* (*Discourses and Radio message* Vol. XVI, pages 174-176), We enounced the principles which regulate the relations between the doctor and his patients and the public authorities, and examined particularly the possibility for the public authorities to grant rights to certain doctors and psychologists which exceed the usual ones of a doctor concerning his patients.

Decisions taken by the public authorities calling for children and youth to be submitted to certain examinations— assuming that the object of such examinations is licit—must take the educators into account if they are to be moral. These are the family and the Church who have a more immediate authority over the children and the youth than the state does.

Furthermore, neither the family nor the Church will oppose steps taken in the interest of the children; but they will not allow the state to act in this field without taking into account their own rights, as was declared by Our Predecessor Pius XI in the Encyclical *Divini illius Magistri* of December 31, 1929, and as We Ourselves have stressed on several occasions.

## III—THE FUNDAMENTAL MORAL PRINCIPLES CONCERNING THE HUMAN PERSONALITY IN PSYCHOLOGY

The answers which We have given up to the present still call for a survey of the basic principles from which they are derived and on the basis of which, in each specific case you will be able to form a fully justified personal judgment.

We will only refer to the principles of a moral order which concern both the personality of the person who practices psychology and that of the patient, to the extent that the latter intervenes through a free and responsible step.

Certain actions are contrary to morals because they only violate the norms of a positive law; others are in themselves of an immoral character; among these the only ones which We will deal with—some will never be moral: others will become immoral because of determined circumstances.

Thus, for example, it is immoral to penetrate into the conscience of someone; but

this act becomes moral if the person involved gives his valid consent. It can also happen that certain actions lay a person open to the dangers of violating a moral law: thus, for instance, the use of tests can in certain cases engender immoral impressions, but this action becomes moral when proportionate motives justify the danger incurred.

One can therefore establish three kinds of immoral actions, which can be judged as such by referring to the three basic principles: whether they are immoral either in themselves, or because the person who enacts them lacks the right to do so, or because of the dangers they provoke without sufficient motive.

Immoral actions in themselves are those where the constitutive elements are incompatible with moral order, that is to say with healthy reasoning; where conscious and free action is contrary either to the essential principles of human nature or to the essential relations which it has with the Creator and with other men, or to the rules governing the use of material things, in the sense that man must never become their slave but must remain their master.

It is therefore contrary to moral order that man should freely and consciously submit his rational faculties to inferior instincts. When the application of the tests, or of psychoanalysis or of any other method reaches this extreme, it becomes immoral and must be refuted without discussion. It is naturally up to your conscience to determine in the individual cases, the lines of conduct to be rejected.

Actions which are immoral because the person who enacts them has no right to do so, do not in themselves contain any essential immoral element but, if they are to be licit, they must suppose the existence of an explicit or implicit right as will be the case in the majority of instances for the doctor and the psychologist. Since a right cannot be taken for granted, it must first of all be established through positive proof by the person who assumes it and based on a juridical reason.

As long as the right has not been obtained, the action is immoral. But if, at a specific time, an action appears to be immoral, it does not still follow that it will always remain such, because it can happen that the right shown to be lacking is acquired later.

Nevertheless, the right in question can never be taken for granted. As We said previously, again in this instance, it is up to you to decide in concrete cases, many examples of which are quoted in the publications of your specialization, whether this principle is applicable to such or such an action.

Thirdly, certain actions are immoral because of the danger incurred without a proportionate motive. We naturally refer to moral danger for the individual or the community, either regarding the personal property of the body, of life, of reputation, of customs or with respect to material assets.

It is obviously impossible to avoid danger completely and such a demand would paralyze all enterprise and would seriously harm every one's interests; hence, moral law permits this risk to be taken on the condition that it is justified by a motive proportionate to the importance of the assets at stake and to the proximity of the danger which threatens them.

You refer several times in your works to the danger engendered by certain techniques, by certain procedures used in applied psychology. The principle which We have laid before you will help you solve in each case the difficulties that may arise.

The norms which We have formulated are above all of a moral order. When psychology discusses a method or the effectiveness of a technique on the theoretical plane, it only considers their aptitude to achieve the specific aim psychology pursues and does not deal with the moral aspect.

In the practical application one must also take into account the spiritual values involved both in the psychologist and the patient and add to the scientific and medical point of view that of the human personality in general.

These fundamental norms are obligatory because they are engendered by the nature of things and belong to the essential order of human action, the supreme and immediately evident principle of which is that one must do good and avoid evil.

At the beginning of this address, we described personality as the "psychosomatic unity of man insofar as determined and governed by the soul" and We have specified the meaning of this definition. Then, We endeavored to answer your questions on the use of certain psychological methods and on the general principles which determine the moral responsibility of the psychologist.

One does not expect the psychologist to have only a theoretical knowledge of abstract norms, but also a deep moral and pondered sense formed by constant loyalty to his conscience. The psychologist who really wishes to seek only the welfare of his patient will be all the more careful to respect the limitations placed upon his actions by morals, since one can say that he holds in his hands the psychic faculties of a man, his capacity of acting freely, of attaining the highest values of his personal destiny and of his social vocation.

It is Our wholehearted wish that your work may ever increasingly penetrate into the complexities of the human personality, that it may help it remedy its weaknesses and meet more faithfully the sublime designs which God, its Creator and Redeemer, formulates for it and proposes to it as its ideal.

As a token of this We call upon you, your collaborators and your families the most abundant heavenly favors, and heartily grant you Our apostolic benediction.

## ENDNOTES

1 The test is described as an experiment of diagnosis which aims at revealing, as objectively and accurately as possible, the distinctive characteristics of the psyche of a personality, or even only a few of its particulars.

2 Narco-synthesis is a more or less special form of interrogation under the action of a hypnotic substance (sodium-pentothal commonly known as "truth serum") which, administered in measured doses by intravenous injections, favors the revelation of attitudes or thoughts which the subject, when in a state of clear consciousness, intentionally or unconsciously conceals. The "Lie-detector" or "polygraph" is an apparatus which permits the simultaneous recording of different somatic manifestations—and of their nature, uncontrolled by the subject—which accompany emotive attitudes produced under certain conditions at the same time as conscious lies, of which these somatic manifestations thus become indirect indications, outside any free participation of the subject under examination (cfr. Prof. Leandro Canestrelli, *Liberta e Responsabilita nella ricerca psychologica*, Rome 1955, pages 8-9).