

# The Filipino Psychologist and the World of Psychology

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**M**y talk this morning will revolve around a few simple questions regarding the geophysics, as it were, of the world of psychology. These questions spring from a desire to determine our location, as Filipino psychologists, in that world.

The basic question is, where is Philippine psychology in the world of psychology? To answer we will have to ask, how can it be located there? In other words, what are the reference points for locating a point in it? To understand the specific Philippine situation, what are the reference points for locating a position in the Philippine psychological world? To evaluate the Philippine location in the world of psychology, do the reference points in it and the reference points in the Philippine psychology tally? If they do not tally and we want to understand, what are the reasons for the discrepancy? If they do not tally and we want to decide future directions, should they be made to tally?

In this Sixth Annual National Convention of our Association, it is an opportune time for us to raise these questions which, I am sure, we have asked ourselves at one time or another before. Our Association has shown viability in its six years of existence and some inner strength to be able to confront now these questions. It has also demonstrated a very vigorous desire to grow and to find a place in the world of psychology. All these suggest to me that it is our obligation to ourselves and to each other that we talk about our future and our life openly.

## REFERENCE POINTS IN THE WORLD OF PSYCHOLOGY

In what direction is the world of psychology going and what are the forces determining its movements? Because of our relative distance from the main hub of that world, which is America, we have an opportunity to view it more dispassionately than even American colleagues. We can more easily avoid being caught in the confusion of partisanship produced when personalities clash over the privilege of having a place in the world. From where we are, some general reference points more easily appear as determining its main directions—its east-west, north-south directions.

There is a philosophical reference point, or more precisely, there are some philosophical orientations defining general modes of approach in psychology. These orientations raise

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some specific philosophical issues which are very involved and which I do not pretend to understand, and my impression is that these issues, as with other things inherent in philosophy, are debatable and are being debated. The main trend in the philosophical orientations of psychology, however, are clear. There are dissatisfactions with the cluttered and muddled works inspired by naïve empiricism and a more favorable preference for logically coherent theoretical approaches which provide broader understanding of the field.

There are, besides the philosophical, the empirical reference points, the work areas in psychology. These work areas are much clearer dimensions for classifying activities of psychologists.

In the past, the work areas in psychology were classified according to the methods of investigation used. There was experimental psychology, characterized by the use of the experimental method, the method which has given this work area a favored position in the minds of psychologists. There was clinical psychology whose method was mostly an art; social psychology was full of surveys.

At present, the boundaries of the work areas are being redefined. The old boundaries set by the methods of investigation (which distinguished experimental psychology from the other work areas) are now being obscured as experimentation has begun to characterize psychology across its whole front. The emergent areas of psychology are being defined more in terms of subject matter, rather than of method—learning, biochemistry of behavior, memory, “verbal learning” and a very close kin “verbal behavior,” cognitive processes, social interaction, etc.

The only work area which is not being defined by its subject matter but by its tools for organizing ideas, is the new field of mathematical psychology. The main reference points in the world of psychology, the philosophical and the empirical reference points, are only by-products of the social conventions or customs of psychologists in locating themselves in it. The main convention, as we all know, is based on the impact of one’s ideas or work: a man is judged mainly by what he has produced, and what he has produced is in turn judged according to whether or not it is a “contribution to knowledge”—which is to say, that it is not only something new, but something new that can be understood in terms of a larger whole or something new that helps understand some things old.

When there is a community of workers motivated to know what are not yet known, those who succeed to really discover knowledge can be easily recognized and appreciated regardless of their field of study. For this reason, the importance of one subject matter *qua* subject matter in contrast to another, such as the greater importance accorded to the biological approaches compared with the none-biological, decreases: importance is then not made to inhere in the subject matter itself but in the quality of one’s work.

#### REFERENCE POINTS IN PHILIPPINE PSYCHOLOGY

How about here in the Philippines? What are our reference points for judging psychology and individual psychologists? We can frankly acknowledge that the

philosophical foundations and aims of psychology as a pure discipline, that is, in terms of philosophy of science, are not salient among us. Our philosophical affiliations are more with social philosophies than with the philosophy of science. We are more sensitive to our role in and responsibility for society, than we are to our role in and responsibility for our discipline. It is very seldom that we question the work of another as to whether it helps us arrive at something intellectually satisfying, a question which would remind us of our affiliations with the world of psychology. On the other hand, the more often used reference point is our social relevance such that what is usually applied in thinking about psychology and psychologists in the Philippines is the socially useful vs. "experimental" dimension. This way of viewing a psychologist clearly does not take into account the more specific attributes of his works that would be used in the world of psychology for purposes of locating him.

Thus, depending on who is making the description, one is described as being more or less "in an ivory tower" or a "basic researcher," or he is "responsible for others" or is "an applied worker." We do not get to be known by each other on the basis of our work areas (Is Professor A working on the biochemical correlates of aggression?), nor whether a piece of work produces in us some intellectual satisfaction or understanding. On the other hand, we come to be known by the purposes of our work (socially useful vs. basic). Clearly, in spite of our constitutional commitment to psychology as a science, the dimension we use to look at ourselves indicates that we are still uncertain about what we ought to do as psychologists.

Work areas, as reference points for locating individual psychologists, are also not very salient in the Philippines. To be a psychologist is often to be a general psychologist, certainly an honorable type of calling, but certainly also one whose role makes difficult the fuller mastery of a field of study and the appreciation of the advantages of specialization.

#### REASSESSING THE PHILIPPINE SITUATION

The reference points in the world of psychology and the Philippine reference points do not tally. Briefly, the difference is one of emphasis. In the world of psychology, there is more emphasis in psychology being science, less in human welfare; in the Philippines, there has been a greater sentiment for human welfare than for science. Hence, here in the Philippines, judging a psychologist in terms of the intellectual worth of his works is not evaluating him on a professionally crucial dimension. Because of this, there has been only little encouragement to study an area intensively enough to truly become an authority in it.

We can see reasons for the difference in our outlook towards psychology and the outlook which has emerged internationally. First of all, there was that tradition in American clinical psychology with its concern for human welfare, which arrived in the Philippines first and was accepted by many of our psychologists. Second, there is also a greater moral pressure for the Filipino psychologist to be concerned with social problems more than, say, his American counterparts. He has a greater opportunity to be able to help socially, and this help is very frequently requested from him. Third, for a long time there was little

or no opportunity for Filipino psychologists to be able to do research and therefore be able to communicate with colleagues abroad. This has produced a discontinuity in the scientific allegiances for some of us. Fourth, for a long time there were very few reminders for Filipino psychologists of the activities of colleagues abroad. Few foreign colleagues have come here before to work with us in research and a number of our younger scholars who had gone abroad for advanced studies have failed to return.

Regardless of our reasons for the differences, we will sooner or later be faced with pressures to reexamine our outlook towards psychology, as we are doing today. Our society will continue to demand our services. On the other hand, we can not afford to frustrate the growing need for scientific achievement among us. Our students, now becoming aware of opportunities for scientific accomplishments abroad and locally, will likely demand similar opportunities. These will make us ask ourselves how we would like our world of psychology in the Philippines to be like.

Most of us are already committed to an answer to that question. Whether or not we should change our outlook on what psychology should be is, of course, a matter of personal choice, and no association could legislate that matter for us. However, there is probably much wisdom in trying to learn from what we see to be the direction psychology has been taking, and on that basis make provision for changes and innovations in ways consistent with our own resources and obligations, so that our departments of psychology in this country and our membership in this Association can follow the mainstreams of our discipline.