

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PIO XII
TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE XIII INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
OF PSYCHOLOGY APPLIED***

Thursday, April 10, 1958

On respect for the privacy of the person

1. Arrived from the whole world to participate in impressive number in the XIII Congress of the International Association of Applied Psychology, you have wished, gentlemen, to be able to visit us with this motive. We are happy to welcome you here, and with all our hearts we welcome each one of you.

The topic that interests you, and of which the present Congress takes its name, is applied psychology, but without limiting your research to only practical applications, you also take very much into consideration problems that arise from theoretical psychology. This can be seen in the abundant documentation that you have brought from the four sections in which your work is divided: psychology applied to work and professional orientation, school psychology, criminal psychology, judicial and penitentiary, of which each one frequently addresses the issues deontology involved in their subjects.

You have also emphasized that there exist for this purpose, among psychologists and theologians, certain divergences of viewpoints that determine lamentable uncertainties in theory and practice, and you have asked us, as far as possible, to do some clarifications. Two points, above all, have been pointed out: the wide-spread use of certain *tests* [1] by means of which the inner depths of the soul are scrupulously listened to: afterwards, the related but broader problem of responsibility moral of the psychologist, the extent and limits of their rights and their duties in the use of scientific methods, whether theoretical research, or practical applications.

We will approach these two points in our exposition, but framing them in a broader synthesis: religious and moral aspect of the human personality, object of psychology. We will consider each other:

- I. Definition of the human personality from the psychological and moral point of view.
- II. Moral obligations of the psychologist regarding the human personality.
- III. Fundamental moral principles concerning the human personality in psychology.

**I. THE DEFINITION OF HUMAN PERSONALITY
FROM THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL POINT OF VIEW**

2. This term of "personality" is found everywhere today, but with different meanings. To tell the truth, it is enough to go through the abundant bibliography on the subject to realize that many

notions that affect the psychic structure of man are expressed in technical terms that conserve in all their parts the same fundamental sense; However, not a few elements of the human psyche are still poorly defined and have not yet found an adequate definition. The term "personality" is among these, both in scientific psychology and in applied psychology. It is necessary, therefore, to specify how we will understand it. Although we contemplate, above all, the moral and religious aspects, while you stop mainly in the psychological aspect,

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

3. This definition speaks primarily of the personality as a "unity", because it considers it as a whole whose parts, although they retain their specific characteristics, are not in any way separate, but organically bound together. Hence, psychology can consider both the psychic faculties and their functions separately, in their own structure and their immanent laws, as well as in their organic totality.

The definition then characterizes this unit as "psychosomatic." The points of view of the theologian and the psychologist coincide here in many points. The technical works of psychology stop to consider, in fact, in every detail, the influence of the body on the spirit, to which it provides a continuous contribution of energy for its vital processes: they study, on the other hand, the influence of the spirit on the body, and strive to scientifically determine the modalities of the government of psychic tendencies by the spiritual soul, drawing practical applications.

The definition expresses, at once, that the psychosomatic unity of man is "determined and governed by the soul." The individual, as an indivisible unit and totality, constitutes a unique and universal center of being and action, an "I" that possesses and disposes of itself. That "I" is the same for all psychic functions, and remains the same even in the course of time. The universality of the "I" in extension and in duration if it applies in particular to the causal link that links it with its spiritual activities. This universal and permanent "I" takes, under the influence of internal or external causes, consciously perceived or implicitly accepted, but always by a free decision, a determined attitude and a permanent character, both in its inner being and in its external behavior.

The personality can be considered as a simple fact, already in the light of moral values that should govern it. It is known that there are personalities of value and other insignificant that some are murky, vicious or depraved; that others are developed straight, honest. But both the one and the other have those characters because they have been given, by their free decision, this or that spiritual orientation. Neither psychology nor morals should forget this fact, even if both consider preferably the ideal to which the personality tends.

4. Since the moral and religious aspects coincide to a great extent with the preceding, it will suffice to add some indications. Metaphysics considers man as the ultimate goal, which is proposed by a living being, endowed with intelligence and freedom, in which body and soul are united in a single nature that has an independent existence. In technical terms, one would say *rationalis naturae individua substantia* [2] . In this sense, man is always a person, an "individual" distinct from all others, an "I" from the first to the last moment of his life, even when he has no conscience. There is, then, a certain difference between this point of view and

the expressions of psychology, but, in any case, without there being insoluble contradiction in it.

The most important features of the personality, from the moral and religious point of view are the following:

a) Man is totally the work of the Creator. Although psychology does not take it into account in its investigations, its experiences and its clinical applications, it always works on the Creator's work; On the other hand, this consideration is essential from the moral and religious point of view, but as long as the theologian and the psychologist remain objective, there is no need to fear conflict and the two can continue their march within their own field and according to the principles of his science.

When man is considered God's work, two important characteristics are discovered in him for the development and value of the Christian personality: his resemblance with God, which comes from the creative act, and his divine filiation in Christ, manifested by Revelation. . In effect, the Christian personality is incomprehensible if these data are forgotten, and psychology, especially applied psychology, is also exposed to misunderstandings and errors if ignored. Because it is clearly about real events and not imaginary or supposed. That these facts are known by revelation takes nothing away from their authenticity, because revelation puts man in the case of exceeding the limits of a limited intelligence to let himself be seized by the infinite intelligence of God.

b) The consideration of the purpose is equally essential from the moral and religious point of view. Man has the possibility and the obligation to perfect his nature not as he understands it, but according to the divine plan. To perfect the image of God in his personality, he must not follow his instincts, but objective norms, such as those of medical deontology, which are imposed on his intelligence and his will and which are dictated by his conscience and by revelation. In addition, conscience will be clarified by consulting the opinions of others and the traditional wisdom of humanity. Some years ago, a code of medical deontology was published in America: *Ethical Standards for Psychologists*, which is based on the responses of seven thousand five hundred members of the *American Psychological Association* (Washington, DC). Although this code contains certain disputable claims, it deserves to be approved the idea that inspires it: the use of serious and competent people to discover and formulate moral standards. Whoever neglects or disregards the norms of the objective moral order will acquire nothing but a deformed and imperfect personality.

c) On the other hand, to say that man is obliged to observe certain rules of morality is to hold him responsible, to believe that he has the objective and subjective possibility of acting according to these rules. This affirmation of responsibility and freedom is equally essential to the personality. It is not possible, therefore, in spite of certain positions defended by some psychologists, to abandon the following principles, on which, on the other hand, it is desirable to establish an agreement as wide as possible between psychologists and theologians. :

1) Every man must be considered normal until proven otherwise.

2) The normal man not only possesses a theoretical freedom, but actually has the use of it as well.

3) The normal man, when he uses as he should the spiritual energies that are at his disposal, is able to overcome the difficulties that are opposed to the observance of the moral law.

4) The abnormal psychological dispositions are not always insurmountable and do not always prevent the subject any possibility of acting freely.

5) Even the dynamisms of the unconscious and the subconscious are not irresistible; it is possible, to a great extent, to dominate them, especially 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 can not make an abstraction of the eschatological aspect. For as long as man lives on earth he may want good or evil; but, once separated from the body by death, the soul is fixed in the arrangements acquired during life. From the moral and religious point of view, the decisive element in the structure of the personality is precisely the attitude that it adopts, in relation to God, its very nature. If it is oriented towards Him, in this orientation it will remain; if, on the contrary, he has departed from him, he will maintain the disposition that was voluntarily imposed. For psychology, this last episode of psychic evolution can only be of secondary interest. Nevertheless,

Such are the points that we would like to develop regarding the personality considered from the moral and religious angle. Let's add some brief observations.

The works of your specialty also deal with the dominant ones in the structure of the personality; that is, of the dispositions that determine the aspect of his psyche. In this way, you divide men into groups, according to whether they master the senses, the instincts, the emotions and affections, the feeling, the will, the intelligence. Even from a religious and moral point of view, this classification is not without significance because the reaction of the various groups to moral and religious motives is often very different.

Your publications frequently address the question of character. The distinction and meaning of the concepts of "character" and "personality" are not always uniform. Sometimes you even get to take them as synonyms. Some argue that the main element of character is the attitude that man adopts before his responsibility; for others, it is their position before values. The personality of the normal man is necessarily confronted with the values and norms of the moral life, which also includes, as we have said, medical deontology; these values are not simple indications, but mandatory guidelines. It is necessary to take a position with respect to them, accept them or reject them. This explains why a psychologist defines character as "the relative constant of research, of appreciation, of personal acceptance of values ». Many works of your Congress allude to this definition, and even comment it extensively.

A final fact that attracts the common interest of the psychologist and the theologian is the existence of certain personalities whose only constant is, so to speak, inconstancy. His

superficiality seems invincible and admits no more value than carelessness or indifference to any order of values. For the psychologist, as for the theologian, this does not constitute a reason for discouragement, but rather a stimulus for work and an invitation to fruitful collaboration, in order to form authentic personalities and solid characters for the good of individuals and the communities.

II. THE MORAL OBLIGATIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST REGARDING HUMAN PERSONALITY

5. And so we come now to the questions of medical deontology, whose solution you have asked for; that is, in the first place, the legality of certain techniques and the way of applying psychological *tests*; then, to the principles of religious and moral order, which are fundamental for the person of the psychologist and that of the patient. Let us note, moreover, that the questions of deontology addressed here also concern everyone who has the use of reason and, in a general way, everyone who is capable of performing a conscious psychic act.

The *tests* and the other methods of psychological research have contributed enormously to the knowledge of the human personality and have provided him with pointed services. It might also be thought that there is no particular problem of medical morality in this field and that everything can be approved without reservation. In fact, no one will deny that modern psychology, considered as a whole, deserves approval from a moral and religious point of view. However, if you consider in particular the goals you pursue and the means you put into practice to achieve them, it will be necessary to make a distinction. Its aims, that is, the scientific study of human psychology and the cure of the diseases of the psyche, can not but be laudable; but the means used sometimes offer justified reservations, *Ethical Standards for Psychologists*.

It does not escape the best psychologists that the most skilful use of existing methods does not penetrate into the area of the psyche, which constitutes, so to speak, the center of the personality and always remains a mystery. At this point, the psychologist can not help but modestly recognize the limits of his possibilities and respect the individuality of man, on which he has to pronounce a judgment; He should strive to perceive in every man the divine plan and help develop it as far as possible. The human personality, with its own characteristics, is, in fact, the noblest and the brightest of the works of creation. Now, those who know about your work understand that certain problems arise in them; you, in effect, you often highlight the objections raised by the penetration of the psychologist into the intimate personality of another. Thus, for example, the use of *narcoanalysis*, already discussed in psychotherapy, is considered illegal in the judicial field; also, the use of the *lie detector* called *lie-detector* or *polygraph* [3] Some author denounces the harmful consequences of the violent emotional tensions provoked in a subject by an experiment, but also ensures that it is necessary to know how to prefer the interest of scientific progress to that of the individual person who serves as subject to the experiment. Some, in psychiatric research and treatment, perform interventions that have not obtained the patient's prior consent or whose exact scope was not known to him. Also the revelation of the real content of his personality can cause, in some cases, serious traumas. In summary, it can be said that sometimes it is necessary to deplore the unjustified intrusion of the psychologist into the deep personality and the serious psychic damages that result for the patient and even for third persons.

Let us, then, check the value of the principles, which even good psychologists invoke to justify certain ways of acting that are debatable.

1. *The interest of science and the importance of psychology*

6. Morality teaches that scientific demands do not justify, by themselves, any way of using psychological techniques and methods, even by serious psychologists and for useful purposes; and the reason is that people interested in psychological research processes should not only take into account scientific laws, but also transcendental norms. In fact, the fundamental issue is not psychology itself and its possible progress, but the human person who uses it and if it obeys higher norms, social, moral, religious. The same thing happens, for the rest, in the other branches of science; Mathematics, for example, or physics are in themselves alien to morals and escape, therefore, their norms; but the person who gives himself to his study and applies his laws never abandons the moral plane, because at no time does his free action stop preparing his transcendent destiny. The *Psychology*, as a science, can not, therefore, assess its requirements more than the extent to which the scale of the values and the higher standards of which we have spoken, and among which are those of law, are respected. justice, equity, respect for human dignity, charity ordered towards oneself and towards others. These rules have nothing mysterious, but appear clearly to all right consciousness and are formulated by natural reason and by revelation. As long as they are observed, each prevents the just demands of psychological science from being asserted in favor of modern methods of investigation.

2. *The subject's consent*

7. The second principle under discussion is that of the *rights of the person* that lends itself to experiences or psychological treatment. In itself, the content of the psyche belongs exclusively to the person (here, the subject of experiences and treatment) and is known only by it. This, then, manifests something of him, by the simple fact of his behavior. When the psychologist deals with what is revealed to him, he does not violate in any way the intimate psychism of the subject. He can also act with complete freedom when the individual consciously exposes a part to him and means in this case that he does not attach any importance to the secret. But there is a large part of his inner world, that the person only discovers some confidants and defends against the interference of others. Certain things will even be kept secret at all costs and in front of anyone. There are others, finally, that the individual would not know how to consider. Psychology also shows that there is a region of intimate psychism - in particular of tendencies and dispositions - so hidden that the individual does not get to know it, not even to suspect it. And just as it is not lawful to appropriate the property of another or attempt against their bodily integrity without their consent, neither is it permissible to enter against their will in their internal sphere, whatever the techniques and methods used.

But one can also ask whether the consent of the interested party is sufficient to open the psychologist's doors without reserve to the psychologist.

If that consent is unjustly taken away, every action of the psychologist shall be lawful; if it is vitiated by a lack of freedom (due to ignorance, error or deception), any attempt to penetrate the depths of the soul will be immoral.

On the contrary, if this consent has been freely given, the psychologist can, in most cases, but not always, act according to the principles of his science, without contravening moral standards. It is necessary to see if the interested party has not exceeded the limits of their competence and their ability to give a valid consent. Man, in fact, does not have unlimited power over himself. Frequently, in your works the legal principle *Volenti non fit iniuria* is alleged: «If the person consents, no injustice is caused to him». Let us point out, first of all, that the intervention of the psychologist could very well damage the rights of a third party, for example, revealing secrets (of state, of office, of family, of confession) or, simply, the right of the: individuals or of the communities to their reputation. It is not enough that the psychologist himself or his assistants are obliged to secrecy, or that it is sometimes possible, for serious reasons, to entrust a secret to a prudent person. Because, as we already pointed out in our speech of April 13, 1953 about psychotherapy and psychology, certain secrets can not be absolutely revealed, not even to a single prudent person.

As for the principle *Volenti non fit iniuria*, does not arouse before the psychologist only one obstacle, namely: the right of the person to protect their inner world. But other obstacles may persist by virtue of moral obligations, which the subject can not suppress to his liking; for example, religiosity, self-esteem, modesty, decency. In this case, although it does not violate any right, the psychologist misses morals. It is important, therefore, to examine for each particular case whether one of these moral motives would not oppose his intervention, and assess its exact scope.

3. Heroic altruism

8. What to think of the motive of *heroic altruism*, alleged to justify the unconditional application of psychological exploration and treatment techniques?

The moral value of human action depends, in the first place, on its object. If this is immoral, the action is immoral; it is useless to invoke the motive that inspires it or the end it pursues. If the object is indifferent or good, one can then ask about the motives or the end, which give the action new moral values. But a reason, no matter how noble, is never enough to make a bad action good. And so, any intervention of the psychologist must be examined, first of all, in its object in light of the given indications. If this object is not according to law or morality, the motive for heroic altruism does not make it acceptable; if the object is lawful, the action may receive, in addition to the stated reason, a higher moral value. The people who, moved by this motive, they offer themselves to the most painful experiences to help others and be useful to them, they are worthy of admiration and imitation. But we must guard against confusing the motive or purpose of the action with its object and transferring to it a moral value it does not have.

4. The general interest and the intervention of public authorities

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

That the public authority can, with respect to individuals, take advantage of, for just reasons, the conquests and the experienced methods of psychology, no one will deny it. But the question arises here about the choice of certain techniques and methods. It is the characteristic

sign of the totalitarian States, which do not pay attention to the means, but use without distinction everything that serves the end pursued, without considering the requirements of the moral law. We already denounced in our speech of October 3, 1953 to the VI International Congress of Criminal Law aberrations that the twentieth century still sad examples to accept torture and violent means in court proceedings.

The fact that immoral procedures are imposed by the public authority, in no way makes them lawful. For this reason, when the public authorities create offices of experience or consultation, the principles that we have discussed apply to all psychological measures, which are called to take.

For the free investigations and the initiatives of these offices, the principles that apply to free research and the initiatives of individuals, and, in general, to the use of theoretical and applied psychology, will be applied.

With regard to the competence of the public authority to impose psychological examinations, the general principles of the limits of the competence of the public authority shall apply. We were already exposed in our addresses of September 13, 1952 on the moral limits of research and medical treatment [4] and September 30, 1954 to the *Sodalitas medicorum universalis* [5], the principles that regulate the relations of the doctor with the people he deals with and with the public powers, in particular the possibility for them to grant certain doctors and psychologists rights that surpass those that a doctor ordinarily possesses with respect to his client. The provisions of the public authority, which try to subject children and young people to certain examinations - assuming that the object of these examinations is lawful -, must take into account, in order to be in accordance with moral standards, the educators, who have upon them an authority more immediate than that of the State; that is, the family and the Church. Neither the one nor the other, on the other hand, will oppose measures taken in the interest of the children; but they will not allow the State to act in this field without taking into account its own right, as our predecessor Pius XI stated in the encyclical *Divini illius Magistri*, of December 31, 1929, and as We have emphasized it on several occasions.

III. THE FUNDAMENTAL MORAL PRINCIPLES CONCERNING HUMAN PERSONALITY IN PSYCHOLOGY

10. The answers that we have given you up to now still require as a complement the enunciation of the basic principles, from which they have been deduced, and thanks to which you can, in each particular case, form a fully justified personal judgment. We will speak only of the principles of moral order, which refer both to the personality of the psychologist and the patient, insofar as it intervenes for a free and responsible act.

Certain actions are contrary to morality, because they violate only the *norms of a positive law*. Others carry in themselves their character of immorality; among these, of which we will only concern ourselves, some will never be moral; others will become immoral depending on certain circumstances. Thus, for example, it is immoral to penetrate someone's conscience; but this act becomes moral if the interested party grants his valid consent. It may also happen that certain actions expose a danger of violating the moral law; So, for example, the use of *testis* entails in certain cases the danger of producing immoral impressions, but it becomes moral when proportionate reasons justify the danger. We can therefore distinguish three species of

immoral actions, which can be judged by reference to three basic principles, according to whether they are immoral in themselves, or because of lack of right in those who perform them, or because of the dangers that provoke without sufficient reason.

The *immoral actions themselves* are those whose constituent elements are irreconcilable with the moral order, ie, with sound reason. The conscious and free action is then contrary, either to the essential principles of human nature, or to the essential relations it has with the Creator and with other men, or the rules that preside over the use of material things, in the sense that man can never become a slave to them, but that he must master them. It is, therefore, contrary to the moral order that man, freely and consciously, submit his rational faculties to the lower instincts. When the application of the *tests* or of psychoanalysis or any other method comes to this, it becomes immoral and must be rejected without discussion. Naturally, it is up to your conscience to determine, in particular cases, what behavior you should reject in each case.

The *immoral actions for lack of law* of those who carry them out do not contain in themselves any essential element that is immoral; but to be carried out licitly suppose a right, already explicit, already implicit, as it will be the case, most of the time, for the doctor and the psychologist. As a right can not be assumed in advance, it is necessary, first of all, to establish it with a positive proof in charge of whoever arrogates it and based on a legal title. As long as the right has not been acquired, the action is immoral. But if at any given moment an action appears as such, it does not follow that it will always be so, because it may happen that the right that was lacking was subsequently acquired. However, you can never presume the right in question. As we have said above, it is up to you, also here, to decide in the concrete cases,

Third, *certain actions are immoral because of the danger*, which they expose without a proportionate reason. We speak, evidently, of the moral danger, for the individual or the community, and with respect to personal goods, of the body, of life, of reputation, of customs, and with respect to material goods. It is obviously impossible to avoid danger at all, and such a demand would paralyze any enterprise and seriously harm the interests of each one; hence, morality allows this risk provided it is justified by a motive proportionate to the importance of the threatened goods and the proximity of the danger that threatens them. You often highlight in your works the danger that certain techniques make, certain procedures used in applied psychology.

The rules that we have formulated are, above all, of a moral nature. When psychology theoretically discusses a method or the effectiveness of a technique, it considers only its aptitude for pursuing its own end, and does not touch the moral plane. But in the practical application it is important to take into account, in addition, the spiritual values at stake, both by the psychologist and his patient, and to unite the point of scientific or medical visa with that of the human personality as a whole. These fundamental norms are obligatory because they derive from the nature of things and belong to the essential order of human action, whose supreme and immediately evident principle is that it is necessary to do good and avoid evil.

11. At the beginning of this speech, we have defined personality as "the psychosomatic unity of man as determined and governed by the soul", and we have specified the meaning of this definition. Then we tried to offer an answer to the questions that you had raised about the use of certain psychological methods and about the general principles that determine the moral responsibility of the psychologist. This is required not only a theoretical knowledge of the

abstract rules, but a deep moral sense, meditated, long formed by a constant fidelity to his conscience .. The psychologist really eager not to seek more than the good of his patient will be shown so much more zealous in respecting the limits set for his action by morals as he has, so to speak,

We wholeheartedly hope that your works will penetrate more and more into the complexity of the human personality, help it to remedy its deficiencies and respond more faithfully to the sublime designs that God, its Creator and its Redeemer, has formed for it and proposes to it. as an ideal

Invoking on all of you, on your collaborators and on your families the most abundant celestial favors, we give you as a pledge of this our apostolic blessing.

* *Venus du monde entier* : AAS 50 (1958) 268-282. *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi* , vol. XX, pgs. 67-82.

[1] The *test* is defined as a diagnostic experience that aims to clarify, as objectively and exactly as possible, the distinctive characters of the psyche of a personality, and even only some of these particularities.

[2] Santo Tomás, *Sum. Theol.* I q.29 a.1.

[3] Narcoanalysis consists, approximately, of a special form of interrogation under the action of a hypnotic substance (sodium *pentothal* , commonly known as "truth serum"), which, when injected intravenously in calculated doses, favors revelation of attitudes or mental contents that the subject, when in a state of clear conscience, has intentionally or unconsciously hidden. The *lie-detector* or *polygraphit* is a device that allows the simultaneous recording of the somatic manifestations diverse - by their own nature uncontrollable by the subject - that accompany the emotional attitudes that occur under certain conditions at the same time as conscious lying, of which the somatic manifestations they become, therefore, indirect indications, apart from any deliberate participation of the subject examined (see Prof. Leandro Canestrelli, *Libertà e responsabilità nella ricerca psicologica* , Rome, 1955, pp. 8-10).

[4] AAS 44 (1952) 779 ss .; *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi* , Vol. XIV, pp.320-325

[5] AAS 46 (1954) 587-598; *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi* , Vol. XVI, pp. 174-176.

Copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana

© Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana