

EMILIO RIBES IÑESTA

**THEORY OF PSYCHOLOGY:
COROLLARIES**

Translated by José G. Ardila Sánchez

Co-presencias Editorial

COLLECTION: "ACADEMIC PSYCHOLOGY"

Section: Theory of Psychology

Editor:

Manuel Porcel Medina

Editorial Co-presencias

Co-presencias aims to be a critical publisher of Psychology and Philosophy of Psychology, with the commitment to build approaches to these areas with nuances of honesty and truth.

All rights reserved.

The content of this work is protected by law.

If you want to share, disseminate, reproduce, distribute or communicate publicly on any type of medium, ask permission from the author of the work, through the publisher:

copresenciaseditorial@gmail.com

©Emilio Ribes Iñesta

©José G. Ardila Sánchez (spanish translation)

©Co-presencias Editorial

C/Babolé. Granada. Spain

www.copresencias.com

Legal Deposit: SA-664-2023

ISBN: 978-84-09-55697-7

Índice de contenido

AUTHOR'S PREFACE	13
AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION	15
TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE	17
ESSAY ONE: THE SUBJECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE: A RELATION WITHOUT «BODY-SUBSTANCE»	19
ESSAY TWO: ON EXPLANATION AND ITS RELATION WITH THE DIFFERENT MODES OF KNOWLEDGE	45
ESSAY THREE: NOTES ON THE GENESIS OF FUNCTIONAL DETACHMENT	65
ESSAY FOUR: REACTIVE ACTIVATION AND DISPOSITIONAL FUNCTIONS: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY REFLECTION	83
ESSAY FIVE: METHDOLOGICAL CHALLENGES FOR A FIELD THEORY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOR	123
ESSAY SIX: EVOLUTION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOR? REFLECTIONS FOR A COMPARATIVE PSYCHOLOGY	161
ESSAY SEVEN: REFERENTIAL BEHAVIOR, LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS, AND MODES OF KNOWLEDGE	219
ESSAY EIGHT: THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF INTERINDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR: ACTING <i>AS IF</i> AND IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICE	243

*A la memòria del meu pare i la meua mare i dels meus avis i àvies,
gràcies a ells soc el que soc.*

« [...] one also forgets that developing a good theory is a complex process that has to start modestly and that takes time.»

P. K. Feyerabend, (1970, p. 68)

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This volume is a direct consequence of the publication of *The scientific study of individual behavior: An introduction to the theory of psychology* in 2018. Much remained to be clarified, as with the result of any theoretical process, at the conclusion of that work. Many issues and topics were narrowly discussed, and others barely suggested. Hence the title of the present volume, which consists of a collection of essays that are not only a logical but also a practical corollary of the theoretical formulation. Some of these essays were published, in a span of a year and a half, as they were being written (the first five) and others (the last four) are unpublished and were written in a different order from the one presented in this volume. Each essay addresses a specific theme, which is implicit or explicit in the 2018 work. The published essays have been revised, undergoing some additions or clarifications. The first essay examines the reasons for the transition from a field theory of behavior to a field theory of psychology. The second essay discusses the concept of explanation and attempts to demonstrate that to explain, in all modes of knowledge, is to circumstantiate a relation between facts or events. The third essay analyzes the process of functional detachment from the perspective of the contacts made possible by biological and conventional reactive systems. The fourth essay grounds dispositional functions in the correspondence between nonspecific and specific activation of reactive systems and the properties of stimulus objects and events. The sixth essay explores and proposes different ways of methodologically addressing the issues raised by a field model for psychological behavior. The seventh essay makes explicit the referential nature of all human behavior and its relation to the functions of language and different modes of knowledge. The eighth essay critically examines the Darwinian and neo-Darwinian evolutionary positions and their claims about psychological behavior in relation to the origin of language and social formations. The ninth and last essay posits the political nature of all interindividual behavior and its implications for psychological behavior as an ideological practice. The set of essays is not only of interest to psychologists. They may also be of interest to those engaged in the study of epistemology and philosophy of science, behavioral biology, social and economic anthropology, political theory, and the study of language.

This work is a paradoxical case for those who are fond of applying a uni-

versal psychological hermeneutic to understand people's motives. The essays contained herein are the result of a life process linked to the possibility of a science of psychology. They are presented here, despite the disappointing nature of prevailing academic life, dominated by personal vanities and meritocratic pursuits. Thus, and congruently, I can only be skeptical as to the effect these writings may have, but it should never be ruled out that they may be of interest to some pilgrim who travels the same road I have traveled.

Emilio Ribes Iñesta Xalapa, Veracruz, October 2020

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

The English edition of this book does not include a first essay entitled *A Theory of Behavior or a Theory of Psychology?* The rest of the book is the same that the Spanish edition, published in 2021 (*Teoría de la psicología: corolarios*). The essay not included is already published in English, in a volume edited by Diego Zilio and Kesler Carrara: *Contemporary Behaviorisms in Debate*, jointly published By Springer Nature and Paradigm also in 2021. This last volume includes also a commentary by Neves Filho and Magalhaes and a reply to them by this author. Those interested in the field formulation advanced in this volume and in a previous one in Spanish also (*El estudio científico de la conducta individual: introducción a la teoría de la psicología*, 2018) are encouraged to read this “missing” essay. This essay provides a general overview about the evolution of the field formulation of psychological behavior following J.R. Kantor interbehavioral proposal, espousing the fundamental categories involved in the analysis of a psychological field, the various types of functional contacts, the extension of the formulation to the study of becoming and psychological individuation, the multidisciplinary relations of psychology with ecobiological and socio-historical sciences, as well with interdisciplinary applications to education, health, housing and other relevant social areas. I hope that this volume stimulates the interest of behaviorally oriented psychologists in a field approach to psychological explanation and research.

Emilio Ribes-Iñesta

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

There are many reasons that *Theory of Psychology: Corollaries* poses special problems for its translator and for English language readers. Two aspects of the text are especially noteworthy and need to be commented upon here. First, one needs to be aware that, in *Theory of Psychology: Corollaries*, Ribes Iñesta frequently employs ordinary language words in uncommon ways. Words, such as *circunstancia*, which would be readily intelligible to a Spanish reader since it has a clear relation to everyday life (*no pude llegar a tiempo por distintas circunstancias* – “I couldn’t arrive on time due to different circumstances”), appear here as verbs (*circunstanciar* – “circumstantiate”) and as nouns (*circunstancialidad* – “circumstantiality”), thus posing a challenge even for a Spanish reader. The most visible examples are his definition of knowledge as ‘to circumstantiate a relation between facts or events’, and his characterization of psychological contacts in terms of their ‘functional circumstantiality’. One of Ribes Iñesta’s aims in *Theory of Psychology: Corollaries* is to locate psychological phenomenology in and as part of ordinary language practices, re-examining psychological words and expressions without technical jargon. This is one of the problems one encounters in translating Ribes Iñesta: there is no direct translation of ordinary language and technical scientific terms.

Second, one finds Ribes Iñesta using quite unique Spanish words that do not have direct equivalents in English. Words such as *convivencia* and *coacción* are some examples of the difficulty in finding words with similar meanings in English. As Spanish is an entirely Latin language, the sense of informality in some Latin words is lost in English, which tends to be more formal. English speakers commonly prefer Germanic words over Latinate ones (it is, for example, the difference between *coacción* and coercion). Such are some of the sort of translation problems found in this text.

Of course, there are also the usual problems that come with the project of translating Spanish to English. These problems demand special attention from the translator because there is no established way to discuss Ribes-Iñesta’s work in English. Some of these decisions are made here, but they may need to be reconsidered in the future.

The present translation attempts to take into account the scholarship of Ribes Iñesta in explaining his own work in English. This translation was initiated some time ago and has undergone changes over the years as Ribes Iñes-

ta has provided important suggestions and clarifications. It is hoped that this translation will open a productive debate about the relevance of Ribes Iñesta's work for scientific thinking writ large.

One final word, expressing my position on the translator's task. In a way, translation is the most critical form of reading of a text. The translator's task does not involve merely conveying what the original author said, partly due to the impossibility of achieving an identical application of one form of writing to another in the same circumstances. As Walter Benjamin put it, "...translation must in large measure turn its attention away from trying to communicate something, away from meaning; the original is essential to translation only insofar as it has already relieved the translator and his work of the burden and organization of what is communicated" (Benjamin, 1923/1997, p. 161).

Although the translator's task involves replacing morphologically different linguistic patterns, the translated text is far from being a faithful replica of the original. It is the result of a process of reconstruction rather than the discovery of an ideal or correct order corresponding exactly to the original text. This means the translator's task is not to establish a direct correspondence between 'original meaning' and 'translated meaning'. Therefore, the translated and original works must be articulated as different 'language games' (Wittgenstein, 1953), that is, as different cultural practices within their respective social circumstances.

José Guillermo Ardila Sánchez
Bogotá, Colombia

References

- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Benjamin, W. (1997) *The Translator's Task* (S. Rendall, Trans.) *Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction*, 10(2), 151–165. (Original work published 1923)

**ESSAY ONE: THE SUBJECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL
SCIENCE: A RELATION WITHOUT «BODY-
SUBSTANCE»**

Two previous writings (Ribes, 2000, 2013) have addressed the problem of the object of knowledge of psychology as a science. Two issues were emphasized in these writings. On one hand, the existence of various psychologies in terms of what they study. On the other hand, the difficulty of placing psychology in the abstracted knowledge continuum represented by the identifiable empirical sciences. Psychology is the only scientific discipline, or a proposal for a discipline, lacking consensus as to its object of knowledge. Simultaneously this has resulted in a confusing (but not blurred) delimitation with respect to its adjacent scientific disciplines.

I will re-examine this problem in three ways: first, the possibility of characterizing the 'psychological' as an object of scientific knowledge; second, the historical trajectory of the notion of the 'psychological' and its link to notions and concepts of other non-scientific modes of knowledge; third, the analysis of two complementary solutions to the problem, both questioning the 'psychological' as an object of knowledge empirically comparable to that of the other established sciences. In the latter section, we will focus on a previous formulation (Ribes, 2018), namely that the psychological constitutes only a fraction of the episodes comprised in ordinary language practices, and, in the case of the animal phylum, a fraction of the activities framed by the ecological niche.

The psychological in the world of everyday reality

The everyday reality of persons corresponds to the experiences and activities that continuously and permanently occur as a result of and in the sphere of interpersonal relations, objects, events, and the constitutive practices of social life. These practices always take place in language, which constitutes the medium enabling any social formation as a collective organization, characterized by the social and specialized division of labor and the deferred appropriation of the products of labor. Although language is commonly identified with speaking, gesturing, writing, and reading, among other occurrence modes, it constitutes something more than these conventional activities. One speaks, gestures, writes or reads, always as an indissoluble part of a social practice, even when some of these practices are apparently performed in "isolation". Gestures, verbalizations, and texts, when written or read, always occur in a proximal or distant practice between persons, where each refers something to the other, in relation to their own acts, or in relation to the circumstances,

objects, persons, and events with which they have direct or indirect contact. When one speaks (gestures writes, or reads) it is always relative to something and with someone. Language does not occur in a vacuum, not even in soliloquy. Language is a collective practice preceding and sustaining all relations between people and, to that extent, it is constitutive of the various episodic forms of such practical relations.

Speaking is the most frequent form of language in social practice and together with gesturing, can be probably considered the primordial ways in which it emerged as a characteristic practice of the species, and which also appears during the socialization of human individuals in ontogeny. Ordinary language, as an everyday social practice, encompasses all the spheres in which relations between individuals occur and, to that extent, can be analyzed or segmented into different types of functional episodes, regardless of the “grammatical” forms in which the isolated expressions of its practical occurrence are classified. One segment of ordinary language practices has to do with what have been identified as ‘psychological expressions’ or ‘mental’ terms. These expressions and terms include first-person expressions, such as “I imagine that...”, “I feel sad”, “I think that...”, “I was very excited to see you”, “I haven’t decided what to do yet”, and the like. These types of expressions can also occur in the third person (e.g., “You look low in spirits”). Both types of expressions, those in the first and third person, are asymmetrical in origin and functionality, and their discussion is relevant to what has been called in recent times “theory of mind” (Ribes, 2004). Mental expressions and terms always occur in circumstances in which the speaker or writer is addressing another person, whether indirectly or directly. This is the meaning of referential language. Reference is not describing or denoting an object, much less a private, hidden experience. It is a relation between persons with respect to something, but said relation does not consist in describing that ‘something’, but in interacting with respect to it. In the case of psychological episodes, these are expressions that include terms such as ‘remember’, ‘forget’, ‘reflect’, ‘feel’, ‘see’, ‘like’, ‘enjoy’, ‘reason’, ‘fear’, ‘hesitate’, ‘risk’, and many others. In every psychological episode, the person constitutes and conforms to the circumstances of her relation with others expressing herself, and the expression (whether or not it is considered psychological) always takes place by combining words, gestures, and performances. Psychological episodes in ordinary language practices always constitute relevant expressive episodes, that is, something is said or shown through an expression that includes phrases, gestures, and different movements directed at others, and this expression is the nu-

cleus of all referential practice. There is no neutral language constituted only of phonations or sequences of “aseptic” words. Words lack univocal meaning in ordinary language. Words are multivocal insofar as their sense or meaning depends on the expression of which they are part, as well as on the situation in which their practice use occurs. The meaning of any word consists in the “use” that is made of and with it, that is, in the practice in which it is employed, of the activities that are part of that practice, in relation to what and to whom it is expressed, as well as the situation and the circumstances in which it occurs. Wittgenstein (1953) stressed that the meaning of a word is always its context of ‘use’, and the so-called ‘mental’ terms are no exception. They all have different uses in ordinary language, and none of them has a univocal sense or meaning. In fact, it is nonsense to even attempt a definition of each of them separately, as the various philosophies and psychologies have done.

The expressive and communicative nature of language as a practice contrasts with the traditional Augustinian and rationalist conception of language as a system of signs that denote objects and events. In the Augustinian conception, words are signs representing objects as ideas. This representational function occurs through naming, identifying, or describing. Denoting implies that words correspond to objects and their properties and that, to that extent, language has a purely denotative or descriptive function of reality. Leaving aside the problem posed by the impossibility of an ideal language, where each word corresponds to a specific object or property, the fact that a denotative language would be redundant for others stands out. It would be a language in which one would speak of the present to others, duplicating one’s own senses of sight and others. It would be a language of names and descriptions of what is present to the senses, a caricature of language since it would lack a communicative and expressive dimension. Nor do words substitute for objects and their properties in the strict sense. No one eats the word ‘apple’ or is transported by the word ‘automobile’. The denotative conception of language assumes that spoken words are signs of things and represents them, but this is a big mistake. As words never occur in a vacuum, but in expressions, they always constitute parts of social practices between individuals. They are part of performances. Only when writing appeared did words appear as signs, but as signs corresponding to locutions, that is, as graphic transcriptions of speech, of its sounds. Words constitute signs in written language, but they are signs that correspond to spoken language and not signs that represent objects.

According to the denotative view of language, ordinary “psychological” expressions are interpreted as reports of events or entities occurring “inside”

the individual, symmetrically to when one speaks about objects and events of the world, as reports of what occurs “outside” the individual. The individual is supposed to report on her conscious experiences, of which she is the only possible observer. Thus, language is posited as a simple “information” vessel to others of what is going on in a supposed “inner” world. This world does not refer only to the phenomena, activities, and events that might originate in the body itself, in the style of the Cartesian passions, but also has to do with the consciousness of the external world, which is thus reduced to a phenomenal representation in the individual’s mind, in the form of sensations, impressions, percepts, or various images (the ‘qualia’). In accord with this view, the individual only knows the external world through her inner world, as impressions or ideas, and passions or affections. The function of ordinary language is reduced to an information vessel between individual minds, and not as effective communication between individuals who share such language as a substantive part of their practice and social life. Therefore, for the denotative view of language, knowledge (and the constituting practices) is regulated and maintained in the “mental life” of individuals.

However, a careful examination of the occurrence of psychological expressions, and the nature of ordinary language practices allows to show how reducing the psychological to the conscious experience as mental life in an interior world is consequence of an incorrect and absurd logic. As it has been initially argued, language is consubstantial to social life as a practice between individuals and their environment (Wittgenstein, 1953). Individuality necessarily emerges from the collective. Individuals do not exist except as differentiation within a collective. Therefore, individuality can only be recognized as differentiation within the practice in a given social formation. Similarly, it is differentiation within the patterns of a species in a habitat. Individuality always constitutes a differentiation within the collective and not of its origin. Animal individuation occurs as speciation, while human individuation occurs as socialization, both individuations as patterns shared with kin. Human individuation is the result of a social process not only through language, but in language. Thus, the criteria, characteristics and identity of individuals are constituted in and by the linguistic practices of each social formation. The so-called “mental” expressions are not manifestations of an inner life prior to and independent of language, but are in fact episodes that manifest the social, practical recognition of dimensions that constitute they identity and the functional sphere of each individual. “Mental” expressions are not reports or indicators of the occurrence of psychological phenomena within individuals.

“Mental” expressions, as parts of episodes in which individuals relate to each other and to their environment, constitute psychological phenomena. The psychological does not have an entity of its own. The psychological originates and occurs only as relation between individuals in a social practice (and in animals in habitat-specific patterns, as will be discussed later). “Mental” expressions are part of the psychological phenomenon as an episode of behavior between individuals, and in no way report or inform about “private” or “internal” phenomena.

The «trick» of «mind»: A logical fallacy and a social myth

Unlike other terms referring to properties of things and beings, such as ‘matter’, ‘life’, and others, the use of the term ‘mind’ is relatively recent (although it has a Latin root) and comes from Anglo-Saxon philosophy. The term ‘mind’ was only incorporated into ordinary language in the 20th century, as a result of the progressive medicalization of social practices with respect to the “deviations” of individuals. Its use was adapted as a more socially acceptable substitute for other terms such as ‘soul’, ‘reason’, ‘understanding’, and ‘spirit’, with a religious and class tradition that made them less “neutral” as a means of explaining and characterizing the behavior of individuals in society. We will examine how the mind (and later, consciousness) was consolidated as a substantive phenomenology, susceptible to scientific study to account for the behavior of human beings, as well as its origins and difference, with respect to the behavior of animals. It is noteworthy that the term ‘consciousness’ was chosen to give substance to the psychological as individuality since in its Latin etymological origin, a language still used in the Renaissance as a educated language, the term meant just the opposite: shared knowledge.

Although transcendentalist thought has a long and mostly religious and political tradition, its contribution to the modern elaboration of the concept of the psychological can be found in the writings of René Descartes on knowledge. In the midst of the Renaissance, Descartes set out to demonstrate the validity of the formal method of knowledge against empiricist approaches, especially that of Bacon. However, his proposal was not limited to arguing about a method of knowledge, but also founded through its application an ontology of rationality and, concomitantly, of psychological phenomena. In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes examined two interrelated issues: one, how to discern true knowledge, and second, the origins of such knowledge.