1   Historical precursors of personality theory

> [A person is] a flow of powerful subjective life, conscious and uncon-
> scious; a whispering gallery in which voices echo from the distant past; a
> gulf stream of fantasies with floating memories of past events, currents of
> contending complexes, plots and counterplots, hopeful intimations and
> ideals … A personality is a full Congress of orators and pressure groups,
> of children, demagogues, communists, isolationists, war-mongers, mug-
> wumps, grafters, log rollers, lobbyists, Caesars and Christs, Machiavellis
> and Judases, Tories and Promethean revolutionists.
>
> <div align="right">Henry Murray, 1940, pp. 160–61</div>

A characteristic of contemporary times is that many students – and more
than a few scholars – think that the core principles of psychology were
developed and validated in the twentieth century, indeed, in their lifetime.
Students are often reluctant to read journal articles that are more than a few
years old. But this is not just characteristic of the young. In his masterful
history of dynamic psychiatry, Henri Ellenberger (1970) wrote that great
system builders and theoreticians like Jean-Martin Charcot and Sigmund
Freud also suffered from a surprising ahistoricism. He stated, "these men
shared an illusion, which has by no means disappeared today, that every-
thing they brought forth was new" (p. 750). This bias can obscure students'
views of the wellsprings of modern psychology and cause them to spurn the
work of those scholars who laid the foundations of their disciplines. The fact
of the matter is that much that Charcot, Freud, and others in the psychiatric
tradition proposed as their own was the legacy of scholars, philosophers,
and scientists who preceded them, in some cases by thousands of years.

An intellectual history of personality theory does exist, and to ignore it is
to truncate our understanding of the very principles on which we wish to
base our studies and research. Those who ignore history lose a precious
perspective on what they are actually thinking.[1] Reading history, however,
presents its own problems. The works of Pierre Janet, William James,

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[1] To focus exclusively on the "culture of the present," without regard to the "cultures of the
    past" that have contributed to it is to be temporally encapsulated. Monocultural modernism
    impoverishes our vision of a field that prides itself on its multicultural perspectives on reality.

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2   A history of personality psychology

Edward B. Titchener, or Sigmund Freud need to be understood in terms of the *Zeitgeist* that permeated the societies in which they were bred and educated. We tend to interpret their words, and give meanings to the events that they describe, in terms of our own social schemas, values, belief systems, and cognitive structures. This is all the more problematic when the texts we study were written in a language with which we are not familiar and the translation of which does not capture the precise meaning that they communicated in the original. The more the worldview of thinkers whom we are studying is alien to our own, the more we are apt to misunderstand them, and the more cautiously should we apply the principles they fashioned to explain their own psycho-social ambience and conception of the human, let alone our own.

In Martin Gardner's (2000) introduction to his book, *The Annotated Alice*, we are warned of the problems in fully understanding the text that describes Alice's adventures in Wonderland. Gardner writes:

> In the case of Alice we are dealing with a very curious, complicated kind of nonsense, written for British readers of another century, and we need to know a great many things that are not part of the text if we wish to capture its full wit and flavor. It is even worse than that, for some of Carroll's jokes could be understood only by residents of Oxford, and other jokes, still more private, could be understood only by the lovely daughters of Dean Liddell.[2]

We characterize the psychological works of the ancients as philosophy, a term that literally signifies "love of wisdom" as readers know. But this was an umbrella term for a multitude of disciplines. As the scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries became increasingly specialized, broad fields of study splintered into numerous sub-disciplines. The terms we used for a global domain, such as philosophy, were replaced by new designations. Logic, political science, rhetoric, physics, ethics, cosmology, epistemology, sociology, and psychology, among others, all formerly fell under one rubric, philosophy. Much of the psychology we treasure as our heritage from past epochs derives from the studies of scholars who regarded themselves as philosophers (Hilgard, 1987; Mahoney, 1991). Edna Heidbreder (1933, p. 20), in an influential and widely cited book, reminded us that prior

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[2] Hermeneutics, the scientific discipline that creates a methodological framework for understanding text that was created by individuals whose perspectives and personal experiences were very different from our own, was first developed to interpret sacred Scripture. It is no less important in the historical texts bearing on psychology. Each of the chapters that follow this Introduction needs to grapple with the "hermeneutical problem" insofar as the subject matter relates to principles that proceed from a historical and cultural context significantly different from our own. Of course, the readers of the chapters that follow differ among themselves with regard to the mediating schemas they employ to interpret historical texts, as well as the actual text they are reading. They will make their own adjustments.

to the twentieth century psychology was likely to be encountered as *epis-temology*. A cursory review of the past will facilitate understanding the process by which psychology has arrived at its relatively mature state.[3] More specifically, it will provide an understanding of human nature and its diverse phenotypic expressions, which constitute, indeed, the subject matter of personality psychology and the science of individual differences.[4] This chapter will reach only to the threshold of a scientific personality psychology that effloresced in the early twentieth century.

Matrix of eastern Mediterranean science

Ancient intellectual systems

Reaching back in time to briefly examine the sources of our knowledge base in personality psychology, which is, of course, rooted in our common nature, casts light on our present understanding of human behavior. The way we think today, our categories of thought, and the unconscious assumptions we make about the world in which we live derive in great measure from the work of towering intellects that addressed the natural mysteries of the world and gave us systems of thought that have not been surpassed – only challenged.

The earliest literate civilization that contributed to a Western under-standing of human nature (of which we have a record) is that of the eastern Mediterranean, which flourished between 2,000 and 3,000 years ago. Prior to the cultural and military hegemony of Rome in the Mediterranean basin there was a burst of philosophical and scientific inquiry that centered in Athens, the jewel of the Mediterranean world, a city set on the Attic peninsula. That city, along with the other coastal and island cities of the Aegean Sea, created the major pillars of Western civilization.[5] Among the most remarkable psychologists who have ever lived was a cluster of thinkers

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[3] Strangely, the multitude of degree designations that were created to correspond to these free-standing disciplines are increasingly being collapsed into the formerly unitary Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree and Master of Arts (MA) degree; the most notable exception is the Doctor of Medicine degree (MD), which is actually a second-cycle degree like the MA rather than a third-cycle degree like the PhD or the DPhil. In the United Kingdom the Bachelor of Medicine (MB) and Bachelor of Surgery (MB BS) are equivalent to the MD in North America.

[4] Individual differences are differences with respect to *something*. Discrepant ideas of what human nature is can confuse a discussion of individual differences and those stable aspects of *Homo sapiens sapiens* on which the differences bear.

[5] Other great civilizations (for example, among many others, the Babylonian, Chinese, Indian, Minoan, Persian, and Semitic) existed in this period, but their influence on the scientific, artistic, and especially the psychological disciplines of the West were not as important.

who dwelt, studied, and taught in a city that is still regarded as the birth-place of Western democracy. The city, Athens, in a dark "fierce world," in the words of Edith Hamilton ([1958] 1993), became "a little centre of white-hot spiritual energy" (p. 13).

Although much of the classical Greek legacy has been lost to us, enough has endured so that *we who are inheritors of that tradition think like Greeks to this day*. Heidbreder (1933) states, "even in the early Greek cosmologies, before the distinction had been made between mind and body, many of the conceptions found in modern psychology, many of its characteristic ways of dealing with its material, were present and in general outline mature" (p. 21). Nevertheless, the number of texts that have been lost is of tragic proportions. For example, of the 120 plays of the great tragedian, Sophocles, who gave inspiration in his Theban trilogy to Freud in his conceptualization of the *Oedipal Conflict*, as well as to feminists in his portrayal of Antigone, only seven have survived. Epicurus, whose renown pervaded the ancient world, was highly esteemed in our era by Nietzsche, especially for the value he placed on friendship as the source of the greatest human pleasure. Of his numerous volumes we have only a few fragments of text. Of the works of the poet, Pindar, who so inspired Rudyard Kipling and other modern poets, relatively few verses have survived. Nevertheless, what has survived from this era has had a profound influence. We think and feel differently because of the systems of thought that flourished in that period.[6]

The influence of Hellenism was not restricted to philosophy or literature. The thinkers of Ancient Greece made towering contributions in architecture, physics, geometry and mathematics, formal logic, rhetoric, statecraft, political science, ethics, astronomy, medicine, music and drama, epic narrative, sculpture and pottery, and, of course, competitive, "Olympic" sports, and psychology. This brilliant efflorescence of the human spirit and its influence on the thought of contemporary humankind is hard to comprehend fully.

Egyptians and numerous ethnically diverse Semitic societies of the eastern Mediterranean, as well as the Minoans and the Babylonians, and the

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[6] Scraps and shards of that epoch continue to come to light. Most recently fifty-three fragments of papyrus, dating from the first century, bearing some text of Empedocles, were found in a library in Strasbourg, France. Aristotle cites Empedocles as the inventor of rhetoric and Galen calls him the father of Italian medicine. Although until 1999 we had no extant text of this major thinker at our disposal, these fragments have given us insight into the mind of one of the seminal thinkers of that era. The *National Post* (Canada), January 29, 1999, reported that Peter Parsons, Britain's leading papyrologist, stated that the find was astounding. He said that Empedocles is a major figure in thought whose work has been lost since the fall of Rome. And now we have a substantial stretch of this philosophical text. It is as if there had been a figure called Shakespeare, of whose work we knew nothing bar a few quotes in other works, and then we discovered ten full pages of one of his plays.

Persians further to the east, all made significant contributions to Western thought (Dumont and Carson, 1995; *cf.* Bernal, 1987). Unlike the Greeks, however, these societies were principally focused on issues of the spirit, the afterlife, and the placation of unseen powers. Their daily activities were largely ordered to please divinities jealous of their status among mutually hostile ethnic communities (see Hamilton, [1958] 1993). On the other hand, the Pythagoreans, Heracliteans, Democriteans, Platonists, Aristotelians, Epicureans, and most post-Socratics, including that towering genius, Lucretius, who wrote in Latin, focused their gaze on a world of *natural laws* rather than one that was controlled by angelic spirits and divinities. They trusted in the *reason* of humans to create order in a "rationally" structured society, rather than in the precepts of a priestly bureaucracy and a theocratic state. Curiously, although they extolled the virtues of a democratic society for themselves, they did not hesitate to bring back prisoners from their foreign wars to serve them. But because the Greek ethos was uncongenial to profit-making enterprises and disdainful of retailers and tradesmen, as well as of manual labor, a broad window of opportunity was created that allowed these subservient classes to advance in that society, and the lower socio-economic classes of the Hellenic and succeeding periods were upwardly mobile. Eventually, the servants of the free citizens of Athens were assimilated into the body politic and assumed the rights of citizens to participate in the governance of the state.

The pre-Socratics

Among the pre-Socratics, physiological theories of the development of personality can be traced at least to Empedocles. Later, Hippocrates (fourth century BCE[7]) and Galen (second century CE) postulated that the features of temperament were related to the physical humors of the body: blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm were linked, as these nouns suggest, to sanguine, melancholic, choleric, and phlegmatic temperaments, respectively. Although the notion that these bodily humors determine the expression of personality traits is now relegated, but not entirely accurately, to pre-scientific and discredited folklore, the principle that personality has certain humoral and physiological determinants is very much alive.

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[7] The Euro-American convention of designating points in time with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth as an anchoring reference point has been a global convention of convenience for geopolitical and commercial purposes. However, out of respect for the great majority of the human race that does not resonate to the expression "Before Christ" or "Year of the Lord" (the Latin of which is abbreviated to AD), we have adopted the convention among some English-speakers of using the expressions, "Before the Common Era" (BCE) and "Common Era" (CE) to replace BC and AD.

As important as these physicians and biologists were for the intellectual bases of Greek culture, the greatest influence was that of one man, Pythagoras (sixth century BCE), whose school provided the impulse for understanding the world in terms of numbers. The school was fascinated by the correspondence of whole numbers and ratios to the realities of their world. As lovers of music, the Pythagoreans were fascinated by the fact that halving the length of a lyre string provided a tone one octave higher than the original. Pleasurable musical chords required lengths that were in simple whole number ratios of 3 to 2, or 4 to 3. Aside from the seminal mathematical discoveries that Pythagoras made, his school promoted an intellectual focus on harmony, order, rhythm, and system, to which our world of the twentieth century still resonates. Modern psychologists are bathed in a Pythagorean ethos that rivals the influence of Plato, Epicurus, Aristotle, and their progeny, the great scientists and thinkers of the eighteenth century (see Murphy, 1968, pp. 3–22).

Character and career psychology

Career psychology, which is rooted in personality theory, is firmly grounded in the Pythagorean philosophy that found its finest expression in the work of Plato. The Greek approach to career emphasized the endowments, inclinations, talents, and worldly aspirations of the individual. If Western culture is individualist more than it is collectivist, we can thank (or blame, as one's value system may dictate) the thinkers of this ancient culture. Dumont and Carson (1995, p. 373) wrote, "In the measure that a society prizes the individuality of its members and recognizes the unique constellation of aptitudes and interests that each person represents, in that measure is there respect for the individual's right to progress in his or her … career." Twenty-seven centuries ago, the great "law-giver," Solon, stated that the lowliest and poorest citizen of Athens had the right and the capacity for self-determination (Hamilton, 1957, p. 24). Herodotus, whose *History* found recent acclaim in the novel (and film), *The English Patient* (Michael Ondaatje, 1993), stated that the members of this commonwealth "obey only the law." And Pericles proclaimed to the Athenians of the fifth century BCE, "You live in the only free city in the world. In Athens alone the state does not interfere with a man's daily life. The individual can be trusted" (Hamilton, 1957, p. 25). Individuals *qua* individuals were allowed, indeed encouraged, to do the extraordinary, to strive to reach the heights in their chosen profession. Hamilton ([1958] 1993, p. 24) cited the classic Greek definition of happiness: "The exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence in a life affording them scope." The ethic of "*excelsior,*" allied to a fierce competitiveness, propelled this society to stunning heights of

achievement in several brief centuries. Hannah Arendt (1958), marveling at
the eruption of this cornucopia of scientific, literary, and artistic products,
proposed that the notion of a free *polis* (city state), combined with the
principle of permitting all individuals, as individuals, to achieve what other-
wise would have been impossible, "multiplied the chances for everybody
to distinguish himself, to show in deed and word who he was in his unique
distinctness" (p. 197). This *meritocratic society* was programmed for success.
Arendt stated that, "one, if not the chief, reason for the incredible develop-
ment of gift and genius in Athens, as well as for the hardly less surprising
swift decline of the city-state, was that precisely from beginning to end its
foremost aim was to make the extraordinary an ordinary occurrence of
daily life" (p. 197).

The scaffolding of personality psychology is a sound developmental
psychology (see Chapter 3, below). The principles of classical develop-
mentalism, elaborated by (among others) Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics,
and the austere Epicureans, have subtly and pervasively permeated the
ethos and the thinking of contemporary Westerners, and the tacit belief
systems that underpin their intellectual discourse. When the classical
Greek and Roman writings, such as survived, were resuscitated in the
Renaissance, they cascaded like rapid streams into the thought patterns of
the major philosophical and political writings of Europe and infused the
thought of what we now know as the Enlightenment.

Educational principles

Plato articulated a large number of principles that are fundamental to
twentieth-century developmental psychology. Their implications for per-
sonality theory seem self-evident. For example, he stressed in more than
one work that the development of character begins in childhood: "You
know also that the beginning is the most important part of any work,
especially in the case of the young and tender thing; for that is the time at
which the character is being formed and the desired impression is
more readily taken" (Plato, [*c.* 370 BCE] 1991, [377], p. 320). The child's
success as an adult depends on the education he or she has been given.
This education includes gymnastics, music, literature (both fiction and
nonfiction), and other cognitive disciplines. Interestingly, Plato's
description of the dangers of allowing children to hear or read stories
that will shape a lazy or dangerous character are reminiscent of current
concerns about violence in the media and its pernicious influence on
youth.

That the character of individuals is shaped by the experiences of their
infancy was also well established in Hellenic thought, although that

8   A history of personality psychology

principle (as it bears on temperament) is being challenged today. In
Laws, for example, one of Plato's later works, he proposed an environ-
mental perspective on the deformation of character that is occasioned by
parents' over-reactions to children's spontaneous and immature
behaviors.

> The privacy of home life screens from general observation many little incidents,
> too readily occasioned by a child's pains, pleasures, and passions which are not in
> keeping with a legislator's recommendations, and tend to bring a medley of
> incongruities into the characters of our citizens. (Book 7, section 788)

Plato asserted that severity in disciplining children could break their spirit
and compromise their ability to function in a civil society. He stated:

> While spoiling of children makes their tempers fretful, peevish and easily upset
> by mere trifles, severe and unconditional tyranny makes its victims spiritless,
> servile, and sullen, rendering them unfit for the intercourse of domestic and
> civic life. (Book 7, section 791)

Plato does not exclude consideration of a genetic component, as the
following passage from the same work attests, but he cautions that dis-
cipline and control must be folded into the childrearing mix:

> Now of all wild young things a boy is the most difficult to handle. Just because he
> more than any other has a fount of intelligence in him that has not yet 'run clear,'
> he is the craftiest, most mischievous, and most unruly of brutes. So the creature
> must be held in check, as we may say, by more than one bridle – in the first place,
> when once he is out of the mother's and the nurse's hand, by attendants to care for
> his childish helplessness, and then further, by all the masters who teach him
> anything. (Book 7, section 808)

It should not be surprising that a nation that was surrounded by ene-
mies and that had frequently been threatened with domination from the
north as well as from the east would place great value on the skills and
prowess of the warrior. The Greeks memorialized the victories of their
warriors at Marathon and Salamis, as they did those recounted in the
Homeric epics of ancient times. In addition to their respect for military
ability, the Greeks admired the heroes of the Olympic games, and the
achievements of these young men were celebrated in processions and civil
ceremonies in which they preceded all others.

The dark side of this respect for military and athletic prowess is the
generally subservient role held by women in Greece in the millennium
that preceded Athens' golden age. The mythical Pandora was a woman,
and she is a symbol of the ambivalence with which women were regarded
in Greek society. Plato reacted to these misogynistic values by affirming
the potential of women to contribute to the wealth and the civility of a free

society.[8] His ideal society was conceived as a meritocracy. He promoted the doctrine that an individual's status in the Republic would be determined by his or her competence, and he was an enthusiastic advocate of universal education:

Children must attend school not only if their parents please but if they do not please; there will be compulsory education of all and sundry, as far as this is possible … My law would apply to females as well as males; they shall both go through the same exercises … Nothing can be more absurd than the practice which prevails in our own country of men and women not following the same pursuits with all their strength and with one mind, for thus the state, instead of being a whole, is reduced to a half, but has the same imposts to pay and the same toils to undergo. (Plato, [*c.* 350 BCE], 1991, [804], p. 722)

Plato also repeatedly reaffirmed his conviction that the child's adult character was shaped in the earliest years of its life by the care and instruction given by parents and teachers, a principle that would later come to be associated with Rousseau, Freud, and many twentieth-century psychologists. In *Laws*, Plato wrote:

According to my view, anyone who would be good at anything must practice that thing from his youth upwards, both in sport and earnest, in its several branches … The teacher should endeavor to direct the children's inclinations and pleasures by the help of amusements to their final aim in life. The most important part of education is right training in the nursery. The soul of the child in his play should be guided to the love of that sort of excellence in which when he grows up to manhood he will have to be perfected. (Plato, [*c.* 350 BCE] 1991, [643], p. 649)

The Greeks appeared to possess something quite similar to a modern conception of *aptitude*: "We are not all alike; there are diversities of natures among us which are adapted to different occupations" (Plato, [*c.* 370 BCE] 1991, [370], p. 317). Thus, the principle of *aptitude–occupation fit*, so prominent in recent career psychology, was proposed by Plato 2,400 years ago.

Moral character

Plato, in *The Republic*, assessed the needs of the *polis* for a police force that could discharge its responsibility to protect the citizenry from foreign invaders and enforce respect for the law within the walls. He stated that: "the higher the duties of the guardian, the more time, and skill, and art, and application will be needed by him…" (p. 319). He continued: "will he not require natural aptitude for his calling? … Then, it will be our duty to

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[8] It should be noted that women of Athens in the fourth century BCE practiced careers that far transcended the usual skills of "husbandry" and home economics (Lefkowitz and Fant, 1982, pp. 27–31).

select if we can, natures which are fitted for the task of guarding the city. And the selection will be no easy matter" ([374], p. 319).

Probity of character must also enter the process of selection:

And a man will be most likely to care about that which he loves? … and he will be most likely to love that which he regards as having the same interests with himself? … Then there must be a selection. Let us note among the guardians those who in their whole life show the greatest eagerness to do what is for the good of their country, and the greatest repugnance to do what is against her interests. (Plato, [*c*. 370 BCE], 1991, [412], p. 339)

Plato deliberated about what was most highly esteemed by Athenian society and required, for example, in the character of its police force. A first determination was whether the candidates for the force would make the interests of the society the rule of their lives. A second determination of the suitability of candidates was their personal history, from youth onward. These young men would be asked to perform tasks in which they could be deceived by others, and it was imperative to determine if they had the astuteness of judgment to suspect and uncover these deceptions: "And there would also be toils, and pains and conflicts prescribed for them, in which they will be made to give further proof of their qualities" (p. 340). Lastly, "they will be tried with seductions – that is the third sort of test – and see what will be their behavior" (p. 340).

The higher the office and responsibilities, the more careful should one be in the selection of those individuals who would fill the office:

Candidates should be proved more thoroughly than gold is proved in the furnace, that we may discover whether they are armed against all seduction, and of a noble bearing always, guardians of themselves and of the music which they have learned, and retaining under all circumstances a rhythmical and harmonious nature, such as will be most serviceable [to others]. ([414], p. 340)

Writing about physicians, Plato asserted that "the most skillful among them are those who from their youth upwards have combined with the knowledge of their art the greatest experience of disease" (p. 337). It is especially useful for the physician to have personally experienced illness; he would then be far more able to understand his patients. (Plato says that the physician differs in this respect from the judge. It would not be appropriate that a judge should have had the experience of evildoing in order to better judge those whom he must condemn.) Moreover, a physician does not have to be healthy to be a good physician, for he cures the body of his patients with his mind; but "the mind which has become and is sick can cure nothing" (Plato, [*c*. 370 BCE] 1991, [408], p. 337). It seems likely that Plato would side with those directors of clinical training programs who argue that personal counseling or analysis (and, with it, personal