A History of Personality Psychology

Frank Dumont presents personality psychology with a fresh description of its current status as well as its prospects. Play, sex, cuisine, creativity, altruism, pets, grieving rituals, and other often neglected topics broaden the scope of this fascinating study. This tract is imbued with historical perspectives that reveal the continuity in the evolving science and research of this discipline over the past century. The author places classic schemas and constructs, as well as current principles, in the context of their socio-political catalysts. He further relates this study of the person to life-span developmental issues and to cultural, gender-specific, trait-based, genetic/epigenetic, and evolutionary research findings.

Personality psychology has recently reconciled itself to more modest paradigms for describing, explaining, and predicting human behavior than it generated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This book documents that transformation, providing valuable information for health service professionals as well as to teachers, researchers, and scientists.

Frank Dumont, now Professor Emeritus, was Full Professor in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Director of the Ph.D. program in his field at McGill University. He was the co-editor of *Six Therapists and One Client* (2000) and a co-editor of Corsini's *The Dictionary of Psychology* (1999). He gratefully acknowledges that much of this book on personality psychology was researched and drafted while he was Visiting Fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge University (2005–2006).

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Theory, Science, and Research from Hellenism to the Twenty-first Century

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To my spouse, Rita,
and our three children,
Rachel, Caroline, and Marc

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Preface

This text presents a contemporary description of personality psychology in an historical perspective and makes projections as to the future of its developmental course. As this broad field of inquiry has a rich, venerable, and storied past, I thought it necessary not only to devote the introductory chapter to it, but also to place the material in the individual chapters in their relevant cultural contexts. Academics and professionals typically acknowledge the importance of understanding the history of their disciplines and their scientific evolution (see Cunningham and Napier, 2008, in their touching obituary to Anne Elizabeth Kelley [1954–2007]). Paradoxically, however, ahistoricism is still rampant, not only in textbooks of the social sciences and psychotherapy, but also in journal articles and reference works. In consequence, I have considered not only the products of current researchers in personality psychology[1] but also those of their distinguished predecessors in times past. Over the past two centuries alone there have been sea changes in scientists' conceptualizations of major aspects of human personality. Such changes continue and need to be situated in their historical contexts.

The thriving sectors of inquiry into personality psychology that we witness today, and which require a multi-volume encyclopedia to delineate adequately, have their origin in the science revolution that was rekindled in the late Renaissance and effloresced in the West in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. That spirit of untrammeled inquiry, which gave birth to modern rationalist and scientific enterprises, spread like a prairie fire over post-Renaissance Europe and, through trade and mercantile structures, to remote points of the globe.

[1] Referring to this social science as *personality psychology* rather than *personology* reflects the usage of many experts in this field. Some, indeed, prefer to call it simply the science of *personality*. Whether to prefer one over the others has proved a vexing issue throughout the book, not only because personology is stylistically simpler and more elegant, but also because nuances of meaning for these terms, which will be addressed, seem to call for one term rather than another.

On a macro-level, attention has been paid in this book to the social, economic, and political forces that have shaped our twenty-first-century world and the way in which we have conceptualized the individual's place in it. On a more narrowly focused level, I have looked at the development of the earlier laboratory-based procedures and brass-instrument technologies, largely developed in German research institutes (where large numbers of young American psychologists went in the nineteenth century for their *praktikantship*) as well as in other regions of the Continent and the United Kingdom. Space is devoted to the historical development of statistical methods that mediated the birth of a science of individual differences, and its idiographic, as opposed to nomothetic, approach to the study of personality. The influence of mental health professions on current and previous models of human personality is sketched. In addition, I define the politico-cultural matrices that have fostered our science and provided the context for our personological paradigms.

Attention is paid to such factors as the mass production of mirrors and looking glasses and the presumed contribution that this has made to the individualism, if not narcissism, of the West. Political movements have thrust us into current socio-cultural, feminist, and intensely humanistic conceptualizations of human nature. Thus, I have a chapter on the shift from illness to wellness models of human nature, another on culture and personality, and a third on gender and personality. Attention is given in these and other chapters to the intersection of personality psychology with other psychological disciplines. This field, frequently referred to as "personology" since Henry Murray coined the term, would be the poorer without the underpinning principles of those psychologies termed developmental, social, neuropsychological, and evolutionary, among others. This text presents in broad strokes the contributions of each of these disciplines to personality psychology.

This book, then, is less a snapshot of personality psychology, time-stamped 2010, than a thematically organized panorama of its evolution to date. Attention will be given to the contributions of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century psychiatry to later formulations of personality, especially those associated with the names of Janet, Freud, and Jung. Though their "grand systems" have been in large part superannuated, what survives and has been transformed will be integrated into those chapters in which their contributions are particularly relevant and significant. For example, developmental psychology, regarded as one of the foundational disciplines of personality psychology, has rendered obsolete many of the principles of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century stage-based psychiatry. The divergence of contemporary from earlier developmental psychologies needs to be clearly delineated where that is possible. To explain personality while apparently subscribing to discredited

developmental notions entails two negative sequelae. First, it deforms the cognitive structures that readers, especially students, use for assimilating current nomothetic notions of personality development. Second, it distorts their idiographic perspectives as well – an outcome particularly damaging for those who will continue their studies in the science of individual differences and possibly in one of the mental health professions.

To help readers grasp more fully the dimensions of the wellness models of the *human* and the "positive psychology" that has gained ascendancy in the twenty-first century, I have sketched, by contrast, the illness models that reigned supreme in the systems of Schopenhauer and Freud. As well as studying those developmental processes that are commonly regarded as healthy and self-actualizing, I found that it was necessary to detail the heuristic usefulness of studying disease (that is, pathognomonic) processes to gain an understanding of the well-adjusted and healthy human. Attention to the work of nineteenth-century psychiatrists, on the one hand, and to such recent psychoneurologists as Antonio Damasio, Joseph LeDoux, Michael Gazzaniga, Erik Kandel, Bradley S. Peterson, and Oliver Sacks, on the other hand, provides support for this latter purpose. Attention, for example, to such precursors of *positive psychology* as William Stern, Alfred Adler, Kurt Goldstein, and Carl Rogers is useful for the wellness perspectives. Advantages, and possibly pitfalls, in either approach are noted, analyzed, and illustrated. Another example: I have described current research and theorizing in trait psychology, but have taken the liberty of tracing the origins of one of its more important tools, factor analysis, to the humble product–moment correlation associated with the names of Galton, Pearson, and others in the British empirical tradition. The analysis of personality psychology, viewed as a continually evolving discipline rather than as a static one, can be seen at a glance by scanning the table of contents of this book.

The history of the philosophy and science of personality is given some initial chapters of its own to counter the ahistorical penchant that modern students, and even some noteworthy scholars, evidence in addressing this discipline. This description represents its dynamic evolution from principles that have been tested and retested by generations of committed, gifted researchers who dared to go beyond the fashionable templates of their day to those principles that are now widely accepted. Twelve topical chapters, despite their historical lens, have relevance to the current practice of mental health professionals, human resources managers, vocational counselors, public relations officers, advertising agents, and others who work in the public domain. Scholars consider science to be morally, if not politically, neutral and extend this view to the science of personality psychology. This, of course, is a contentious issue. Readers will be guided by their own principles in making use of the ideas proposed in this volume.

My biases need to be made apparent from the start. As I have noted (2000):

> On entering the 21st century, the *Zeitgeist* will favor, it appears, theories of personality that are life-span developmental … more persons-relational, constructivist, process-oriented and dynamic, that is, Heraclitean, holistic, teleonomic, evolutionary, genetics-based, gender-equal, emic, sociological, and idiographic. Clearly, personality theories that predate the Second World War are not, by and large, consistent with these descriptors. It appears that the era of the "grand systems" is past. Personology will reconcile itself to more modest paradigms to describe, explain, and predict human behavior. (p. 2093)

Two points, one substantive, one stylistic, must be made evident here. First, I have tried to integrate frequently neglected topics in the evolution of personality psychology, such as the developmental character of play activities in middle and later adulthood, the individual differences that exist in the importance given to food preparation in the lives of individual families, as well as bereavement and grieving, and the personality penchants that nudge individuals toward and away from religious practice. Second, I have tried to walk a narrow path *between* (a) sounding like a pedant and (b) talking down to readers. I trust that seasoned professionals and scholars will not be offended by explanatory notes and definitions that I have offered in footnotes for the benefit of students. For the same reason, as well as in the interests of completeness, I have included the commonplace notions of, say, Freud's psychosexual stages of development and details bearing on the Big Five Model of temperament.

Finally, I ask for clemency from the reader who, I trust, will reasonably cut me some slack given the breadth of this project. I did not *fully* appreciate before I began this odyssey how difficult it was going to be to trace in a balanced way the impact on personality psychology of its (ancient) historical antecedents, developmental psychology, self-psychology, and such topics as gender, culture, emotion, biology, trait psychology, psychometry, and certain domains in which *I do not* consider myself an expert. Fine scholars spend their lives investigating slivers of any one of them. (I have spent much of my professional life in the domains of educational, developmental, and counselling psychology [at McGill University].)[2] In that light I welcome any corrections and the righting of any imbalances that readers (to be given due credit) will chance to find in this volume.

[2] I was tenured, full professor at McGill University, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, until retirement in 2006. This Preface and large segments of this book were written in 2005–2006 while a Visiting Fellow in Wolfson College of Cambridge University.

I wish to thank the community of scholars, both known and unknown to me – seasoned researchers and unseasoned students too numerous to name – who share in the "distributed cognition" that this book represents. They have functioned as the intellectual prostheses that we all need as we progress in our careers. I have welcomed their feedback, both corrective and positive, to the contentious positions here articulated in many areas of this discipline. This book is the product of ideas that have been generated by legions of scientist-thinkers and which, like open-source software, can be stitched together in varying patterns. Few of the ideas *per se* are original with me. I have simply examined them through different lenses.

In particular I wish to thank those who have reviewed this text in various parts, or in whole, and made important contributions to it, most notably, Danny Wedding, Michael Wertheimer, Edward Shorter, Daniel J. Driscoll, Bradley Peterson, Marilyn Fitzpatrick, Andrew Carson, and Millard Susman. I would be remiss if, further, I did not thank the Editor, Hetty Reid (the Commissioning Editor, Psychology) and her staff, for their prompt, helpful, and ready response to my every query and concern. I express a special thanks to Lyn Flight, who diligently read the manuscript from start to finish and presented a great deal of helpful professional advice on documentational and stylistic matters. I am also grateful to the learned reviewers of the manuscript who offered extremely helpful ideas and suggestions for the book's improvement. Their contributions enhanced the overall integrity of the manuscript and facilitated its production in book form. The author has had the last say on its contents and is therefore responsible (a) for flaws in the way the ideas have been configured, (b) for significant lacunae in his arguments, and (c) for the fragile sustainability of his hypotheses and conclusions. In the final analysis the book's virtues belong almost entirely to the scholars who have preceded him in the varied fields broached in this book

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Notes on tables

Table 3.1 is adapted from *The Science of Personality*, Lawrence A. Pervin (1996), New York: John Wiley, p. 166. Reprinted with permission of John Wiley.

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 from *The 16PF Fifth Edition Administrator's Manual*, M. T. Russell and D. L. Karol (1994), Champaign, IL. Reproduced by permission of the Institute for Personality and Ability Testing.