



1 Past for Present: Psychology in Search of a Paradigm

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Psychology seems to mean many things to many people. In everyday life the word *psychology* has a variety of meanings with mentalistic, behavioristic, or abnormal implications. The popular media seem to reinforce this perception. For example, we often hear the words *psychological*, *psychiatric*, and *psychoanalytic* equated and used interchangeably. We often read or see research results on smoking or drug hazards conducted by psychologists but described as medical research. Or we see instances where a psychologist, using “armchair” methodology, responds with profound advice in a newspaper to a reader in distress. Nor does the college-level introductory course to psychology necessarily dispel the confusion. Those who have taken such courses may have dim, confused recollections of IQ tests, dogs salivating, hierarchies of anxiety, the Oedipus complex, figure-ground reversals, rats running through a maze, heart rate control, peer group influence, and so on. Similarly, listing the range of positions held by psychologists does not resolve the confusion. We find psychologists in hospitals and community mental health centers, in advertising and industry, in government and the military, and in universities.

Whereas the diversity of modern psychology is a source of bewilderment, psychology’s range of study is justifiably broad. As a formal, independent discipline studied and taught in universities, psychology has been in existence for only just over a century. However, we should recognize that people have been “psychologizing” since they first began to wonder about themselves. The long history of theories and models of psychology slowly evolved, mostly within philosophy, until the nineteenth century, when the methodological spirit of science was applied to the study of psychology and the formal discipline of psychology appeared in Western intellectual institutions.

The emergence of psychology as a formal discipline takes us to the problem of **science**. Generally, science is defined as the systematic acquisition of knowledge. However, from a narrower perspective, the acquisition of knowledge is limited to **observations** validated by our senses. That is, we must see,

hear, touch, taste, or smell events to confirm their existence as scientific data. This type of science is called **empiricism**, and its most controlled application is called the *experimental method*, in which variables are manipulated and measured. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, this narrower, empirical definition of science linked up with a nineteenth-century model of what psychology should study to form the discipline of psychology. Yet neither at that time nor during the subsequent years did that form of psychology win universal acceptance. Some scholars argued for a different model of psychology, a broader definition of science, or both. Thus, psychology's long past, coupled with more recent differences of opinion about the form that the discipline of psychology should take, resulted in the heterogeneous discipline we study today.

Although the variety of opinions about psychology can be confusing, it can also be a source of excitement. Psychology is a young, unsettled, and often unwieldy discipline that has a highly stimulating subject-matter to investigate – human activity. The purpose of studying psychology's history is to help remove the confusion caused by the diversity of psychology. By using this diversity as a resource rather than a hindrance, our understanding of psychology's development makes contemporary psychology richer for us. There are other reasons to study the history of psychology. Knowledge of the past, per se, is certainly worthwhile and beneficial in providing perspectives. Furthermore, the study of psychology's history may help illuminate some of the questions that have concerned scholars through the ages. However, the most pressing reason to study the history of psychology may be to understand the basis of its present diversity.

Approaches to Historical Investigation

In their examination of the past, historians have proposed structures, or models, within which events may be categorized, correlated, and explained. For example, the preeminent historian of psychology E. G. Boring (1950) contrasted the **great person** and **zeitgeist** models as they applied to the history of psychology. Expressed succinctly, the great person view holds that historical progress occurs through the actions of great persons who are able to synthesize events and by their own efforts change the path of those events toward some innovation. The zeitgeist, or “spirit of the times,” model argues that events by themselves have a momentum that permits the right person at the right time to express an innovation. Accordingly, Martin Luther (1483–1545), in nailing his theses condemning corruption in the Church to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517, may be viewed either as a formidable figure starting the **Reformation** or as the agent of Reformation forces already at work.

A variant of the zeitgeist view for the history of science, proposed by Kuhn (1970), suggests that social and cultural forces develop **paradigms**, or models, of science at various stages and that scientific work is conducted within a given paradigm for a limited period until the paradigm is replaced. The change in

paradigms is a by-product of both the cultural needs of the age and the inability of the old paradigm to accommodate new scientific findings. Accordingly, Kuhn presents scientific progress as a cyclic process. Within a given scientific paradigm that is accepted by a consensus of scientists, an anomaly arises that cannot be explained or accommodated by the paradigm. A crisis is generated, and new theories compete to replace the inadequate paradigm. Finally, a single view gains the commitment and allegiance of a group of scientists who implement a scientific revolution, and a new paradigm is accepted. When an anomaly again arises, the cycle is repeated. Thus, Kuhn proposed a relativity in the understanding of theories, facts, and observations that is sensitive to the implicit assumptions of scientists.

Watson (1971) proposed another manner of structuring the historical progress of science. Watson offered prescriptions, or dimensions for classifying psychological issues, by examining and describing the relationship between scientific findings and the prevailing cultural forces of a given age. Essentially, Watson's strategy evaluated a number of possible underlying assumptions and consequent implications of theoretical positions. This approach is useful as an evaluative tool to compare the issues and implications for various theoretical positions within psychology.

Interpretations and explanations of historical events certainly help us bring order to the history of psychology. As we examine psychology's past and its contemporary state, we shall refer to the various interpretations of scientific history to understand the meaning of specific intellectual movements. However, this book may be best described as eclectic in orientation. As its authors, we are not historians, but rather psychologists writing of the historical antecedents of our discipline in the clearest way we can, without any commitment or allegiance to a particular interpretation of historical events.

Psychology's Search for a Unifying Paradigm

Although a definitive framework for psychology has proven elusive, the search for one nevertheless is often compelling. Consider these quotes from some prominent figures within the modern history of psychology:

A string of raw facts; a little gossip and wrangle about opinions; a little classification and generalization on the mere descriptive level; a strong prejudice that we *have* states of mind, and that our brain conditions them: but not a single law in the same sense in which physics shows us laws, not a single proposition from which any consequence can causally be deduced....This is no science, it is only the hope for a science. (William James, 1892/1910, p. 468)

To reach a clear understanding as to the true meaning of psychology is a more difficult task than the solution of any special psychological problem. (Hugo Münsterberg, 1914/1923, p. 8)

It is generally agreed that nowadays psychology has arrived at a very undesirable degree of disunity. Each school, if not each individual, seeks to establish the science independently both of his predecessors and even of his colleagues. The result is that all alike have come into general discredit. Psychology is a byword of reproach among other sciences. (Charles Spearman, 1935, p. 11)

Even now after some forty-five years of sustained effort I am not sure that I have made any progress, have learnt anything of human nature.... The science implied by the word "psychology" is beyond our reach, no such science exists and no such science is possible to us.... The present condition of psychology is deplorable. (William McDougall, 1936, pp. 3, 5)

Using Kuhn's terminology from above, the desire and expectation that psychology must be a scientific study push the discipline toward an explanatory order so that valid and reliable laws or relationships can evolve. That is, psychology must aim for order and organization of the principles that govern human experience, and the framework that accommodates the progress of psychological inquiry is the paradigm for psychology at a particular point in that progress. As mentioned, the definitive paradigm that merits complete agreement among psychologists has yet to emerge.

Psychology's Enduring Questions

Despite the dissonance about psychology's definition, as reflected in the quotes from the prominent scholars above, certain questions seem to recur since psychology's inception as a formal discipline in the nineteenth century, and these may be summarized as follows:

The mind: Does each person possess a mind, and if so, is the mind the entity in subjective experience that gives each person a sense of identity and self-knowledge or **consciousness**? This question is both obvious and profound. It seems obvious because of the Greek roots of the word "psychology" (*psyche*), meaning the study of the mind or **soul**. It is profound because it gets to the **essence** of what it means to be human and to understand why we know that we know – that we are self-aware. If the mind is real, how does it work? Does the mind act on the external world, or does it react to external reality? Alternatively, if the mind does not exist, what explains our sense of identity, unity, and self-awareness? Do the layers of neural systems give rise to that subjective experience, so that mechanics of the nervous system are sufficiently explanatory?

Sources of knowledge: How do we acquire the content of our experiences? How do we learn and grow? Does the person interact with the environment as a kind of passive receptor, such that information comes into our nervous system and is stored, or are our internal learning processes more

active and **dynamic**? Do we in fact act on the information coming from our experience, which involves individual interpretation, judgment, and values? These questions also directly impact our understanding of memory. Do we store experiences that generally conform to the elements of the experiences as they occurred, or do we flavor memories depending on our individual character, motivations, and values?

Fortunately, historians of psychology (e.g., Allport, 1940; Watson, 1967; Coan, 1968; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2014) have organized and identified many of the recurring themes and enduring questions within the field. We can present a summary of them here, since we will be coming back to them as our story of psychology's history unfolds.

Naturalism–Supernaturalism. What is the nature of ultimate reality? Is reality explained entirely by principles found within nature (**naturalism**), or must we seek answers that transcend nature (supernaturalism)? Is the universe empty and impersonal (impersonalism) or full and personal (personalism)? Does God exist, and if so, what is the nature of God (atheism, agnosticism, deism, monotheism, polytheism, pantheism)? What is the origin and end of human **existence**: Is human life random and meaningless (**skepticism**) or full of purpose and meaning (teleology)? Related questions include whether reality is made of one entity (**monism**) – either matter (**materialism**) or mind (idealism) – or two entities (**dualism**), consisting of both matter and mind. These questions are very profound and have powerful implications for psychology. This level of thought falls under the field of philosophy called **metaphysics**, which is concerned with the overarching nature and structure of reality.

Universalism–Relativism. What is the nature of truth? Is truth eternal, universal, and knowable (**universalism**), or is truth transient, relative, and/or unknowable (**relativism**)? Are there reliable standards and guides for living? What is good and what is evil for human persons? How do we understand suffering, and how do we attain authentic happiness and human flourishing? These questions are likewise related directly to psychology and are usually pondered under the purview of **ethics**, which is another part of philosophical study that considers the nature of truth, goodness, and beauty.

Empiricism–Rationalism. Does human knowledge come primarily through experience (**empiricism**) or through reason (**rationalism**)? Related questions include the following: Does knowledge move from specific instances to general principles (**induction**) or from general principles to specific instances (**deduction**)? Is the human mind passive as a recipient of knowledge, or is the human mind active as a creator of knowledge? Is knowledge derived from sensory **association** (**empiricism**), mental processes (rationalism), and/or **innate** categories

(**nativism**)? As we shall see, the answers to these questions determine psychology's position relative to the natural and physical sciences, and they fall under the part of philosophy known as **epistemology**. This branch of philosophy studies the nature, sources, and methods of obtaining human knowledge.

Reductionism–Holism. Another group of questions coming to psychology from epistemology asks the following: Does research consider **analysis** of the parts (**reductionism**) or synthesis of the whole (**holism**) of its subject or object of study? Are psychological data presented in terms of relatively small units (**molecularism**) or relatively large units (**molarism**)? Related questions include the following: Is there an emphasis upon knowledge that is measurable in numbers (**quantitativism**) or that is distinguished in **essence** or structure (**qualitativism**)? Is there more of an emphasis on operational definitions (**operationalism**) or phenomenological descriptions (**phenomenalism**)? Is there an emphasis upon discovering general principles and laws (nomotheticism) or upon describing particular events or persons (**idiographicism**)?

Four categories of questions come to psychology from **anthropology**, which seeks to understand and articulate human nature. That is, how do human persons fit into relationships with other forms of life, the earth, and the universe?

Body–Mind. How are mind and body related in human nature? Typically referred to as the “mind–body problem,” this relationship elicits an array of answers to questions of monism or dualism as applied to human nature. While there are many subsets of questions that flow from the basic answers to the body–mind problem, the fundamental issue is whether at some level there are one or two aspects to human experience. Is human nature composed of both body and mind (dualism) where both physical body and non-physical mind interact and influence one another (**interactionism**)? Or is human nature composed of either body or mind (monism), as a physical body only (materialism) or as an immaterial mind only (idealism)? Related to the mind–body question is the question of whether human nature may be sufficiently understood by mechanistic, material laws (**mechanism**) or through additional consideration of a vital, nonmaterial force (**vitalism**).

Determinism–Voluntarism. Is human nature free or determined? If free (using distinctions suggested by James, 1897/1979, p. 117), is this freedom an absolute freedom (indeterminism) or a limited/finite freedom (soft determinism)? If determined (hard determinism), is human nature determined more by biology (nature, heredity), environment (nurture,

experience), or psychology (thoughts, emotions)? These influences are further discussed within the next two dimensions below.

Irrational–Rational. Is human nature rational or irrational? Is human nature guided more by rational aspects (rationalism), such as intellect, reason, and conscious thoughts, or irrational aspects (irrationalism), such as emotions, intuitions, and **unconscious** instincts? A related question is whether any distinction between humans and other animals is merely quantitative (**evolutionism**) or truly qualitative (**humanism**).

Individual–Relational. What is the nature of human individuality and relationality? At least two aspects of this “problem of the self” may be considered. First, regarding personality, is there a substantial and persistent self, mind, soul, or identity (**staticism**) that accounts for a unity and continuity of experience and behavior? Or, is there lack of such a persistent self (**dynamicism**) resulting in a discontinuity of experience and behavior, either as a fragmented stream-of-consciousness (idealism) or as a random stimulus-and-response sequence (materialism)? Second, regarding relationality, is the individual personality developed primarily from within, through nature (heredity) and/or natural adaptation, or influenced primarily from without, through nurture (environment) and/or social construction?

The intellectual domains of metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and anthropology have fed the richness that is the integrating platform we know as psychology. The questions arising from these intellectual domains have recurred with fair consistency throughout the history of psychology and are summarized in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Enduring questions in psychology

Domain	Enduring Question
Metaphysics	Naturalism–Supernaturalism
Ethics	Universalism–Relativism
Epistemology	Empiricism–Rationalism
	Reductionism–Holism
Anthropology	Body–Mind
	Determinism–Voluntarism
	Irrational–Rational
	Individual–Relational

These questions provide a platform for beginning a study of psychology's past. They have been asked since the beginning of recorded history, and various answers have contributed to the paradigms of psychology through the ages. Certainly, we can see that the answers we offer to these questions will lead us in different directions. So, as we consider the long past of psychology, it will be beneficial to keep these questions at the forefront of our study.

Western and Eastern Traditions in Psychology

As noted previously, psychology, as it emerged as a formal discipline of study in nineteenth-century Europe, was the product of an intellectual tradition that viewed human experience through a particular set of assumptions. These assumptions were largely derived from answers to the questions listed above to basic human experience. The very conceptualization of psychology as we know it today was formed, nurtured, structured, and argued over during the 2,500 years of turbulent intellectual progress that have elapsed since the flowering of classical Greek thought. Psychology's reliance on Western intellectual thought must be appreciated, and this relationship justifies this book's emphasis on Western traditions.

Whereas the long intellectual tie between contemporary empirical psychology and Western thought is apparent, it is also important to recognize that non-Western philosophies have likewise given considerable attention to the nature of the person and the internal world of individual reflection. So, before proceeding with our story, it is appropriate to pause briefly to acknowledge that there are alternative approaches to the subject-matter of psychology, articulated through a variety of intellectual works in religion and especially in Eastern philosophies. The non-Western heritage of psychology's past often brought new achievements to Western intellectual progress or resulted in the rediscovery of ancient writings preserved by Eastern scholars. For example, algebra, usually attributed to ancient Indian philosophers, was first used in the West by ancient Greeks of the fourth century before Christ (BC), but was lost during the Middle Ages. Western Europe recovered it as a result of contacts with Islamic culture during the Crusades. Arab scholars had preserved algebra, and through them its methodology and very name were reintroduced to the West (*aljbr* means "to reunite separate or broken parts").

As we begin the study of psychology's past within Western intellectual history, starting with ancient Greek thought in Chapter 3, keep in mind the broader perspective – namely, that intellectual achievements were occurring simultaneously in other cultures and traditions. For the most part, these events were parallel developments with little interaction, but in some cases these advances enriched Western traditions. So, we offer some acknowledgment of these other traditions coming from Eastern cultures before we begin consideration of the ancient Greeks. Then, the remainder of the story in this book is told from a

predominantly Western perspective in terms of psychology's emergence as an intellectual trend within the mosaic of Western civilization. Recognizing such recurring themes as unity, universal harmony, reflective knowledge, and virtuous living, we find psychology deeply embedded in the teachings of religion and moral philosophy. Thus, as we begin a more focused historical journey, we should be mindful of other rich traditions that readily accommodate the subject-matter of psychology within alternative perspectives.

The Study of the History of Psychology

As a specialization, the study of the history and systems of psychology is a small but robust area of scholarship. Probably because of psychology's youth relative to other disciplines, the systematic study of its history was largely ignored before World War II. Several important and still interesting scholarly works, however, examined the history of psychology during the prewar period. The first was the erudite *History of Psychology* by G. S. Brett, published in three volumes between 1912 and 1921. Also in 1912, an anthology of excerpts of the psychological writings of scholars from Greek antiquity to the nineteenth century was published by B. Rand under the title *The Classical Psychologists*. In 1929, two Americans, W. B. Pillsbury and E. G. Boring, published books on the history of psychology. Of the two, Edwin Boring (1886–1968) became something of an institution and a spokesperson for the history of psychology. His work *A History of Experimental Psychology*, published in 1929 and revised in 1950, became a classic reference for the study of the history of psychology.

Since World War II, the history and systems of psychology have evolved into a recognized field of specialized study. In 1966, the Graduate School at Loyola University Chicago awarded a Ph.D. to Antos Rancurello, late professor of psychology at the University of Dayton, for the first discursive dissertation in psychology on a historical topic – a study of Franz Brentano. Subsequently, doctoral specialization in the history of psychology was offered in comprehensive programs at the University of New Hampshire and Carleton University. In 1966, the American Psychological Association established a division of the History of Psychology (Division 26); this was followed in 1969 by the formation of Cheiron: International Society for the History of the Behavioral and Social Sciences. The Archives of the History of American Psychology were started at the University of Akron in 1965. Most importantly, the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* began publication in 1965 and continues to publish scholarly research of an interdisciplinary scope, now part of John Wiley & Sons. In addition, since 1988, the *History of the Social Sciences* has been supported by Sage Publications, and the American Psychological Association through Division 26 sponsors a quarterly journal, *History of Psychology*. All of these developments have stimulated research in the antecedents of modern psychology.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Contrast the “great person” with the “zeitgeist” interpretation of historical progress and cite an example of each.
2. Given psychology’s varied definitions and applications, is an overall paradigm possible? Is this assumption at odds with the goals of psychology as a unified scientific discipline?
3. Two central categories of intellectual debate within psychology were described as questions relating to the mind and those related to the sources of knowledge. Are these sufficient and complete?
4. Discuss the notion that “psychology has a long past, but a short history,” especially in relation to other disciplines of the natural and social sciences.

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