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978-1-107-05739-5 - A Conceptual History of Psychology: Exploring the Tangled Web:

Second Edition

John D. Greenwood

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A Conceptual History of Psychology

In the new edition of this original and penetrating book, John D. Greenwood provides an in-depth analysis of the subtle conceptual continuities and discontinuities that inform the history of psychology from the speculations of the Ancient Greeks to contemporary cognitive psychology. He also demonstrates the fashion in which different conceptions of human and animal psychology and behavior have become associated and disassociated over the centuries. Moving easily among psychology, history of science, physiology, and philosophy, Greenwood provides a critically challenging account of the development of psychology as a science. He relates the remarkable stories of the intellectual pioneers of modern psychology, while exploring the social and political milieu in which they operated, and dispels many of the myths of the history of psychology, based upon the best historical scholarship of recent decades. This is an impressive overview that will appeal to scholars and graduate students of the history of psychology.

John D. Greenwood is Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where he currently serves in the Ph.D. Programs in Philosophy and Psychology. He is the author of four books, *The Disappearance of the Social in American Social Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), *Realism, Identity and Emotion* (1994), *Relations and Representations* (1991), and *Explanation and Experiment in Social Psychological Science* (1989), three edited volumes, and over fifty articles. His main research interests are in the history and philosophy of social and psychological science.

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Preface

Nearly twenty years ago I agreed to team-teach a course in the history of psychology with a female colleague who was pregnant at the time and was not be able to complete the course alone. At the end of the course she confided that she did not really enjoy teaching history of psychology, and I told her that I had fallen in love with it. By mutual agreement I took over the course, and have been hooked on the subject ever since. Shortly after, I gave my first conference paper in the history of psychology, published the first of a series of papers on the history of psychology, and finally a book (for this press) on the history of social psychology. Having a professional background in philosophy and psychology, I felt like a graduate student again. Then I set myself the most daunting task of all, to write a complete history of psychology from the time of the ancient Greeks to the “cognitive revolution” in psychology. The present work is the product of many years of scholarly labor and multiple transformations of the original draft.

This work advances a conceptual history of psychology, which traces the continuities and discontinuities in our theoretical conceptions of human psychology and behavior from the speculations of the ancient Greeks to the institutionalized scientific psychology of the twentieth century. I highlight some of the remarkable continuities that reach across centuries and millennia, such as those between Aristotle’s psychology and contemporary cognitive psychology, as well as fundamental discontinuities between superficially similar theoretical positions, such as those between Darwinism and the forms of functionalist and behaviorist psychology commonly supposed to be based upon it. I also try to tease apart historically associated positions that have no essential connection, such as the common association between materialism and the view that human psychology is continuous with animal psychology.

I have made a serious attempt to illustrate the contingency of many of the conceptual principles and associations that have informed the historical development of psychology and that today continue to shape our conception of the contemporary discipline. I demonstrate that the general

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acceptance of certain conceptions of human psychology and behavior has often been the idiosyncratic product of personal, social, cultural, economic, political, religious, and institutional factors, which made certain conceptions and associations appealing to theorists at the time, even if there were no compelling theoretical or empirical reasons for accepting them.

I do not dispute that many developments in the history of psychology were the product of genuine advances in theory, methodology, or empirical evidence. However, I also demonstrate that many of the conceptions of human psychology and behavior associated with them were not mandated by these advances but were rather the product of independent factors often peculiar to that time or place, such as the late nineteenth-century conception of humans and animals as “conscious automata,” which was supported by but not established by developments in experimental physiology. To illustrate this contingency, I have included a short history of the development of the subdiscipline of clinical psychology, which did not follow the general pattern of the development of psychology in the twentieth century (from structural to functional psychology, and from the various phases of behaviorism to contemporary cognitive psychology).

I have not made any special attempt to represent the history of psychology as progressive and integrated, for the simple reason that often enough it was not. I have rather tried to let the historical record reveal whatever degree of progression or integration (or lack thereof) there was during any historical period. I think that any critical and honest student of the history of psychology must recognize that it represents a complex web of conceptual relations that reaches backward and forward across the centuries, including the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Instead, I have explored these conceptual relations through critical comparisons and contrasts that highlight their continued relevance for contemporary debates about the foundational principles of the discipline.

I have done my best to take into account the excellent scholarship in the history of psychology produced in the last five decades, in professional journals such as the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* and (more recently) *History of Psychology*, and in specialist monographs such as those included in the Cambridge University Press series *Studies in the History of Psychology*. As a result, I challenge many of the myths that have established themselves through repetition in traditional histories, such as the claim that during the medieval period, hundreds of thousands of neurotic and psychotic women were burned at the stake because they were misdiagnosed as witches; that Wilhelm Wundt held that experimentation was inappropriate for the study of higher cognitive and social processes; that functional and behaviorist psychologies were a natural

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development of Darwin's theory of evolution; and that contemporary cognitive psychology marks a return to the structural or "introspective" psychology of the early twentieth century. I hope that as a result, readers will find the accounts of individuals and movements covered in this work refreshingly thought provoking and reflective of current scholarship. While I do not expect that everyone will agree with my characterizations, I hope they will agree that I have usually made a good case for them.

I have tried to make the work critically challenging, but I have also done my best to present the material in a clear and engaging style. While I focus on conceptual continuity and discontinuity, I have also included interesting, intriguing, and sometimes downright salacious details about the personal lives of individual psychologists – not in order to sensationalize the history of psychology, but because they are integral parts of it.

I trace the development of our conception of human psychology and behavior over the past two millennia, with particular emphasis on the period of the scientific revolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the development of institutional scientific psychology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I also examine the development of our conception of science and how this has shaped our conception of a scientific psychology. I try to show that the development of scientific psychology has been shaped powerfully by commitment to a number of principles that have been associated historically with physical science, such as the principles of atomism, invariance, and universality, but the relevance for psychology of which remains an open and empirical question.

This work is a revised, streamlined, and updated version of my 2009 *A Conceptual History of Psychology*, originally published by McGraw-Hill as a textbook marketed for undergraduate history and systems courses. I am grateful to Hetty Marx and Cambridge University Press for enabling me to reproduce the work in its originally intended form, as a serious scholarly work that could also be used as a text in graduate (and some upper undergraduate) courses in the history of psychology. This has allowed me to develop some of the conceptual themes beyond the confines of the original work.

I would also like to thank the following persons and institutions for helping to make this work a reality: to the hundreds of students who have taken my classes in the history of psychology at City College and the CUNY Graduate Center for the past twenty years, whose searching questions have kept the subject alive for me; to David Leary, for his encouragement, conversations, and Jamesian spirit; to Kurt Danziger, for setting the standard of scholarship to which all historians of psychology aspire, and for recognizing the significance of conceptual history of psychology; to my friends and colleagues at Cheiron (The International

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Society for the History of the Behavioral and Social Sciences), for their intellectual hospitality over the years; to the editors and publishers of the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* (Wiley), *History and Psychology* (American Psychological Association [APA]), *History of the Human Sciences* (Sage), and *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* (Blackwell) for their permission to employ material published in these journals; to Bill Kelly and the CUNY Graduate Center for providing me with a semester's leave while serving as Executive Officer of the PhD Program in Philosophy, without which this book could not have been completed; and to Shelagh, Robert, and Holly, for keeping me on the bright side of the road.