
2

Metatheory and the Critique of Psychology

Historically unaware psychologists might assume that the critique of psychology is an intellectual development that emerged with the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Western Europe and North America. However, the critique of psychology has a long historical and theoretical tradition and can be traced back in Western thought, if one were to endorse historical continuity, at least to Aristotle's (trans. 1941/2001) critique of platonic philosophy, for example, regarding the nature of the existence of the *Forms* (pp. 786–789).¹ However, the most significant critique of psychology in terms of understanding the outlook of current psychology was expressed by Immanuel Kant. This critique becomes the temporal starting point for this book and limits this study to the end of the 18th, the 19th, the 20th, and to the beginning of the 21st century. Such a limitation would also be justified based on Danziger's (1997a) argument of historical *discontinuity*, which suggests that psychology as a separate field of study did not exist before the 18th century and thus he considered textbooks on the history of psychology that begin with the Greeks as ignorant (see p. 21). Although I agree with the notion that traditional historiography has wrongly emphasized continuity, I would also argue that there is

more continuity than critics perceive and that the focus on Kant not only has intellectual but also pragmatic justifications.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

In order to present a history of the critique of psychology, which has not been written from a systematic point of view, a metatheoretical perspective is required, from which critical discourses can be identified and their significance evaluated. The following metatheoretical reflections are tools in order to cope with the large amount of critical information that exists in psychological discourses. From a theoretical point of view, at least five basic academic perspectives of psychology can be identified since the 1700s, each operating with different assumptions about the subject matter, methodology, and ethical–political dimensions of psychology, and from and against which major critiques arose. *Metaphysical psychology* was expressed in rational and empirical psychology (see Chapter 3). *Philosophical psychology* in the first half of the 19th century was still trapped in metaphysical considerations but incorporated results of the natural sciences while keeping to the primacy of philosophical reflections. *Natural-scientific psychology's* systematic and organized history could also be traced to Aristotle (384–322 BCE), or if one draws a more stringent criterion, to at least René Descartes (1596–1650).³ Yet, its dominant role in psychology emerged only in the middle and at the end of the 19th century. Parallel and partially in response to natural-scientific psychology, the perspective of *human-scientific psychology* developed, which received its name only late in the 19th century (see below) but, if one were to believe in continuity, one could trace its roots back to the classical Greeks in Western thought. Certainly, human-scientific psychology has its foundation in metaphysical and philosophical psychology.⁴

Finally, there is another perspective of psychology, a psychology which accompanied some of the other perspectives and which could be labeled *critical psychology* (or better: critical psychologies) that questioned and addressed the relevance of a given mainstream psychology (for practice, for the working class, for women, for visible minorities, for non-Western culture, etc.). This perspective was and is often expressed within an ethical–political imperative (Marxism, feminism, postmodernism, postcolonialism may be the most prominent examples).⁵ Within this perspective a multitude of different approaches exist, which make the critical perspective less a coherent program and more an amalgam of various frameworks that have reflected on psychology as a discipline (for contemporary versions see Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997; Sloan, 2000; J. A. Smith,

Harré, & Langenhove, 1995). Critical metatheoretical reflections on psychology have also emerged within natural-scientific and human-scientific discourses but the focus in this book is on those critical frameworks that have a strong ethical-political meaning. This perspective emerged with the consolidation of academic psychology in the 19th century, but reached its zenith only in the 20th century.

From a historical perspective, any *typology* is problematic because it puts overlapping and historically discontinuous developments into an exclusive schemata (on the idea of overlapping disciplines, see Bunge, 1990). However, from a theoretical point of view, such a typology is a useful instrument in order to cope with historical complexity and to recognize that the critique of psychology developed very different arguments, depending on the perspective from which it emerged. The proposed perspectives have distinctive visions, problem assessments, and solutions for psychology. Representatives of the natural-scientific program challenged the unscientific character of human-scientific psychology and favored an alignment of psychology with the natural sciences (see Chapter 4). Human-scientific psychology objected to the reductionist character of natural-scientific psychology and promoted an alignment of psychology with the human sciences such as history (see Chapter 5). Ethical-political critical perspectives in psychology challenged both and advocated ethical but also epistemological and ontological reflections on the status of psychology (see Chapters 6–9). Most important for current concerns are the natural-scientific, human-scientific, and ethical-political critiques whereas the philosophical critique of metaphysical psychology has mainly been forgotten.

Which critique was dominant at a given point of time depended significantly on developments within the mainstream of academic psychology. Thus, before natural-scientific psychology became dominant, critiques, mostly natural-scientifically inspired ones, have focused on the lack of precision and clarity of philosophical and later of human-scientific psychology. With the successes of natural-scientific psychology, and its final dominance, critiques stemming from human-scientific psychology have addressed the ontological and epistemological shortcomings of natural-scientific psychology. This is not to say or ignore that many critiques emerged from research programs within one perspective such as the natural-scientific one, and targeted other natural-scientific research programs (for example, behaviorism rejected structuralism, cognitivism refuted behaviorism) (see Chapter 4). And although the critical perspective of psychology was available from the beginning of psychology (Marxism and feminism), the critique of the lack of political, ethical, and practical relevance of natural- and human-scientific psychology drew

attention in the mainstream only after 1945 (due to changes in the socio-historical context).

Within historical and theoretical reconstructions, the focus is often on the dualism of natural-scientific and human-scientific psychology. Despite my emphasis on the heuristic function of the division proposed here, and the reality of contradictory psychological discourses on psychological topics, the central division of natural-scientific and human-scientific psychologies might find support in the dualistic nature of psychological concepts. Concepts such as memory can be studied from a strictly natural-scientific perspective as well as from a purely human-scientific perspective. If one looks at memory's physiological basis, and its functions, principles, "laws," and divisions, one is not necessarily interested in an individually developed memory, the very *content* of memory. A person's unique memory of past experiences that gives meaning to this person's identity is part of a cultural-historical trajectory and as such the topic for a human-scientific perspective. From a natural-scientific perspective looking at the meaning of memory is problematic, whereas from a human-scientific point of view the physiological basis of memory may be considered important but not particularly significant to psychology. Both approaches promote very different ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies for their particular conceptualization of psychological subject matters. And although not in the nature of the concept, but in the nature of human inquiry, it is understandable that questions concerning the relevance of such analyses have been raised.

From an institutional point of view⁶ the traditional chiasm between natural-scientific and human-scientific psychology is recapitulated in contemporary North American and European departments of psychology, which are located sometimes in the faculties of arts and sometimes in the faculties of sciences (or in both), and which grant either a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree to their undergraduate students. Programs and teachers of psychology try to ensure that students are exposed to courses from both the *arts* and the *sciences*. However, the classification of a course based on a concept may be arbitrary because one can look at *perception* not only from a traditional natural-scientific, but also from a human-scientific perspective (see Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). This dualism is even part of everyday consciousness, for example, when undergraduate students expect a human-scientific approach from psychology, and become disillusioned when they confess that they thought that psychology deals with the meaning of mental life, and not with statistical models or bio-physiological processes.⁷

Historians of psychology, meta-theoreticians, and psychologists have addressed the dualism of natural-scientific and human-scientific psychol-

ogy. The historian of psychology O. Klemm (1911) distinguished *metaphysical* from *empirical* psychology, the former dealing with issues of the soul, and the latter discovering psychological phenomena through introspection. He saw the relationship between the two as complementary, because metaphysical psychology included empirical connections of the mind and empirical psychology addressed questions of metaphysics. Based on a model of linear development of science, one could make the argument that metaphysical psychology developed into philosophical-empirical and later into natural-scientific psychology. However, it is historically more accurate to suggest that metaphysical psychology moved in significant parts into human-scientific psychology as proposed by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) at the end of the 19th century, whereas empirical psychology moved into natural-scientific psychology.

The distinction between the two systems of psychology played a significant historical role in the German-speaking tradition, where these two research perspectives not only co-existed but also shared public and academic support up to the middle of the 20th century. The explicit differentiation of the two systems of psychology goes back to Christian Wolff (1679–1754) who divided psychology into a *rational* and an *empirical* branch (see Chapter 3). Herbart (1816) followed Wolff by dividing his textbook into empirical and rational parts, a formal arrangement of which he was well aware of (see p. 8), even if he rejected the content of Wolff's psychology. Fortlage (1855), in line with these distinctions, differentiated between a *speculative* and an *empirical* psychology, the former capturing (in a synthetic mode) the essence of the soul, and the latter proceeding in an analytic way when it concerned mental life.⁸ Volkmann (1884) based his dualism of psychology on the *synthetic* (synthetische) and *analytic* (analytische) procedures of science. Synthetic psychology combined knowledge in a way that psychological phenomenon emerged as a result, whereas analytic psychology divided psychological phenomena. He also argued that higher psychological states needed a different type of psychology than do lower psychological states.

Dilthey (1894/1957) provided a systematic foundation for two different types of psychology when he divided psychology into a *descriptive* (human-scientific) and an *analytical* explanatory (natural-scientific) part. This was the time when the two psychologies were at the height of the struggle for dominance. Whereas Dilthey acknowledged the importance of a natural-scientific psychology, he nevertheless promoted psychology within the human-scientific tradition, arguing that psychology's subject matter was human experience and thus its method must be *understanding* (see Chapter 5). In direct response, Ebbinghaus (1896) endorsed psychology as a natural science that did not need the method of understanding,

but should rely on natural-scientific explanation and experimental methods. Instead of the concept of the natural and human sciences, Windelband (1894/1998) promoted the dualism based on a methodological opposition between nomothetic (sciences of law—what is) and idiographic (sciences of events—what was) empirical programs. Münsterberg (1899) rejected the division between nomothetic sciences that should produce general facts and idiographic sciences that establish single facts for psychology, well aware of the dualistic status of psychology (Münsterberg, 1903).

The *father* of German systematic experimental psychology, Wundt (1921), divided his psychology into an experimental branch that focused on the precise analysis of the basic processes of consciousness and a *Völkerpsychologie*⁹ that covered psychological processes that accompany the development of human communities and mental products in the context of values, customs, and language, or what one could label complex psychological processes. Wundt acknowledged that the experimental method was relevant for simple psychological processes whereas complex psychological processes, emerging from culture and society, demanded a nonexperimental psychology (see also Rieber & D. K. Robinson, 2001). Experimental psychology was not entirely useless because training in experimental procedures honed the observer's vision and the ability to think psychologically in the context of a *Völkerpsychologie* (Wundt, 1921, p. vi).

Spranger (1914/1928) followed Dilthey and called a psychology based on the natural sciences a *psychology of elements* that dissected psychological processes. He distinguished this psychology from philosophical psychology, labeled *structural psychology* (see p. 8), which treated psychological phenomena as a whole in a meaningful context. He clearly promoted structural psychology, because if one tried to explain the decision of a human being, one did not dissect the judgment into ideas, feelings, and desires but one would understand the decision as a whole—on the background of a historical meaning and value complex. Jaspers (1913/1997) not only drew on this dualism in his metatheoretical reflections, but applied it to the field of psychopathology. He divided his study into a *verstehende Psychologie* (translated as *meaningful psychic connections*) as well as into an *erklärende Psychologie* (translated as *causal connection of psychic life*). He believed in the interconnection of both when he suggested that one understands through empathy how a psychological event emerges from another, but that, based on the experience that psychological phenomena are linked together in a regular fashion, one can “*explain causally*” (p. 301).

In the North American tradition it was Allport (1937, 1940) who, based on Windelband's reflection, prepared the notion of a *nomothetic* and

idiographic psychology. Critically, he observed an increasing nomothetic commitment in psychology but he pled for the inclusion of an idiographic approach in scientific psychology. Maslow (1966/1969) distinguished between a mechanistic and a humanistic science in psychology, and the term *third-force psychology*, used by historians of psychology, positions humanistic and existential psychology against behaviorism and psychoanalysis. However, in the proposed metatheoretical reflections behaviorism is considered part of the natural-scientific perspective, whereas psychoanalysis and existential or humanistic psychology are considered part of human-scientific approaches. Well known, but less applicable to the suggested system, is Cronbach's (1957) distinction between correlational and experimental psychology as two disciplines of psychology. I suggest that this method-based distinction intuitively acknowledged that there are ontological and epistemological reasons that justify the existence of different psychologies. In recent discourses it has become popular to divide psychology based on methodology, into quantitative and qualitative branches. Again I suggest that psychologists recognize that there exist justifiably different perspectives in psychology that require different kinds of theories and practices.

Evidently, metatheoretical discourses favor a dualistic understanding of psychology. The perspective of a critical psychology seems to represent presentist concerns. It was Habermas (1968/1972) who proposed, in the context of the relationship between knowledge and interest and on the background of an epistemological foundation for a theory of society three kinds of sciences: empirical-analytic sciences, historical-hermeneutic sciences, and critically oriented sciences whereby each type of science can be characterized by a specific underlying cognitive *interest* that guides its pursuit of knowledge. Empirical-analytical sciences are motivated by the production of nomological knowledge in order to achieve technical control over processes or objects. Historical-hermeneutic sciences are motivated by the practical interest of interpretation and understanding of meanings. Critical theory has an emancipatory interest and applies self-reflection as a basic principle of investigation. Habermas did not relate this program to psychological knowledge, but to human knowledge in general, and he identified psychoanalysis and ideology critique as prototypes of critical sciences, an approach which differs from the perspectives of psychology as proposed here (see also McCarthy, 1978).

I suggested, based in part on Habermas's epistemological justification, a tripartite division of current psychology into *scientia*, *cultura*, *critica* regarding different knowledge *functions* of psychology (see Teo, 1999a). Ethical-political psychologies (as critical psychologies) with their moral impetus were not limited to the moral domain and have captured

discourses in the second half of the 20th century, without having an explicit identity and self-understanding as a general ethical research program (they consider themselves Marxist, feminist, postmodern or postcolonial psychologists rather than ethical-political critical psychologists). Ethical-political psychology can also emerge from outside the discipline and later move into psychology (in fact, all of the discussed programs did so).

The critical perspective does not represent a coherent perspective but expresses different ideas and voices of concern. Critical psychology can also include a branch that focuses on issues of subject matter and methodology without an immediate ethical-political concern; yet, for the purpose of this book I will focus on critical psychology as it pertains to the ethical-political domain (there might be some skepticism as to whether postmodern psychology is motivated by an ethical-political concern; see Chapter 8). Historians of psychology might be reluctant to accept the ethical-political perspective as a separate perspective, but concerns of relevance have been expressed in psychology since the middle of the 19th century. For example, Beneke (1845) argued that political, social, and religious tumults could be overcome with the help of psychology, but he did not outline a program for such a political psychology of social action. He complained that academic psychology was about theory and not practice and that German philosophy rather dealt with *Absolute Nothingness* (absolutes Nichts) rather than with social reality (see p. viii).

From a synchronic perspective, representatives of different systems have strong views on how psychology should operate. Herrmann (1979) expressed the self-understanding of postwar natural-scientific, nomothetic psychology most clearly. He argued that "scientific psychologists formulate law-like statements of hypothetical character" (pp. 17–18), they formalize theories and methods, test theoretical hypotheses, use objective and reliable measurements, provide explanations and predictions, and they cherish "the experiment as the most important way for gaining knowledge" (p. 18).¹⁰ Such a natural-scientific perspective is very different from Giorgi's (1990) human-scientific view suggesting that objectivity "is not a matter of transforming subjectively based data into objective data, but precisely a way of grasping subjectivity as it expresses itself, that is, to grasp it in its subjectivity would indicate objectivity" (p. 32). Koch (1981) expressed his epistemological critical perspective on psychology when he doubted that despite a century of knowledge-accumulation in psychology, and, despite the presumption, expressed in the huge volume of published articles, that studies have discovered thousands of nomological events, there is not a single statement that represents a law in the meaning of the natural sciences or not even in the meaning of universal acceptance. Prilleltensky and Fox (1997) expressed the stance of a critical

psychology, incorporating the ethical-political dimension, when they “evaluate the theories and practices of psychology in terms of how they maintain an unjust and unsatisfying status quo” (p. 3).

From a theoretical perspective (see Teo, 1999a), *natural-scientific psychology* produces knowledge about a psychological object or event, or details of this object or event. The subject matter *psyche* is divided into parts. Psychologists working within this perspective intend to provide nomological knowledge, using an analytic methodology of breaking down a psychological object or event, and studying well defined, detailed, and specific research problems. Since the 20th century, experimental and quantitative methods have been considered appropriate. Natural-scientific psychology is also associated with the traditional philosophies of science, with empiricism (Hume, 1748/1988), logical empiricism (Reichenbach, 1938), or with critical rationalism (Popper, 1935/1992), which have often been labeled as positivist epistemologies (this is not true for Popper). Natural-scientific psychology operates on the premise that the truth of an object can be reached through better, enhanced, more sophisticated, and future research, and psychologists in this system believe in a continuous progress of knowledge regarding the human psyche. Not only physiological psychology but also structuralism, functionalism, behaviorism, cognitive psychology, and biological psychology intend to follow this model of the natural sciences despite their fundamental differences. Yet, often natural-scientific psychology means solely assimilating the *methodology* of the natural sciences.

Human-scientific psychology produces meaning-knowledge primarily about a subject for a subject (this subject may be an individual, a community, or a whole culture). Its basic methodology can be described as synthetic, as putting together psychological parts into a larger whole, or, research is already focused on the whole picture of the human psyche. The subject matter of human-scientific psychology is the human psyche in its totality. Hermeneutic epistemologies (e.g., Gadamer, 1960/1997) have been considered corresponding philosophies of knowledge, while qualitative methods have traditionally been considered appropriate for this knowledge function (Rennie, 1995). The premise in this psychological perspective refers to the assumption that the provision of meaning allows individuals, communities, and cultures to become better individuals, communities, or cultures.¹¹ Psychological intervention is motivated by the idea that the personal status quo can be transformed into something better. Hermeneutic, some phenomenological, existential, humanistic, and dialogical psychologies should be mentioned here, as well as psychoanalysis (despite its original self-understanding as a natural science).

The third perspective refers to *critical psychology*, which produces critical knowledge about psychology as a field. The status of this perspective

is different from the other knowledge functions, as its level of research is often metapsychological and it operates from a research distance regarding the other perspectives of psychology. The critical study of psychology or psychological topics might be more prevalent in psychology than in many other academic disciplines, probably due to the complex subject matter of psychology and the dualistic nature of psychological concepts (see above). Critical psychology operates on the assumption that critical reflection changes theories, methods, concepts, and practices of the academic psychological community.

Critical perspectives of psychology have not only existed for the last 40 years, but appeared during the emergence of psychology as a scientific discipline and have accompanied psychology since then. In the crisis discussions of psychology, which have a history of over 100 years, one can easily see that critical psychology is part of the history of psychology. A large part of this reflection targets problems of epistemology and ontology and more recently, the ethical-political dimension of psychology. In this vein, Slife and Williams (1997) even recommended the recognition of a theoretical psychology as a formal subdiscipline that facilitates communication on the theoretical and practical status of psychology, envisioning theoretical psychologists as consultants (similar to statisticians) on hidden assumptions in psychology.

It was Willy who published in 1899 probably the first book on *The Crisis in Psychology*, already proclaiming a *chronic crisis* (p. 1) of psychology at the end of the 19th century. His main argument was that speculation has not been purged from the psychology of his time (including Wundt).¹² Other famous examples are Bühler's (1927/1978) reflections on the crisis, and, written in the same year, Vygotsky's (Wygotski, 1985) discussion of the historical meaning of the crisis of psychology. Since then, reflections on the crisis of psychology have exploded and include a vast crisis literature pertaining to subfields of psychology (e.g., social or clinical psychology). Reviewing the literature after 1945 one sees references to the crisis of psychology in the context of a crisis in social psychology, personality psychology, and experimental psychology, a crisis of psychometrics, an identity crisis of developmental psychology, a statistical crisis, a methodological crisis, a scientific crisis, a philosophical crisis, a theoretical crisis, an anthropological crisis, a pragmatic crisis, an ethical crisis, a political crisis, a crisis of German psychology, a crisis of the psychological labor market, a publication crisis, a *crisis of crisis proclamations* and so on (for overviews see Bakan, 1996; Gummersbach, 1985; Herzog, 1984; Mos, 1996; Teo, 1993; Westland, 1978).¹³

Some psychologists aim their critiques at epistemological and ontological issues such as subject matter (e.g., Eberlein & Pieper, 1976), methodol-

ogy of psychology (e.g., Smedslund, 1988), or ethical-political relevance, which includes the practical relevance of psychology (e.g., Prilleltensky, 1994). Practical and ethical-political relevance should be addressed in terms of generality and particularity. One can question the relevance of psychology for practice and its application for humans in general or its meaningfulness for certain human groups. Based on the idea of psychology as a bourgeois discipline, Marxist psychology questioned the (emancipatory) relevance of psychology for working people (e.g., Bruder, 1973). Feminist psychology addressed the issue of psychology as a male science, the mis-measure of woman (Tavris, 1992), and the neglect of women's concerns and experiences (Gilligan, 1982). Postcolonial psychology addressed the issue of neglect of ethnic minorities within American-European culture and the exclusion of non-Western cultures' conceptualizations of psychological matters (or the inferiorizing of minorities and other cultures), while at the same time mainstream psychology is seen as a *white* Western discipline (Teo & Febbraro, 2003). Other psychologists, more inclined towards postmodernism, address psychology's limited relevance for contemporary culture and consider psychology's language game outdated¹⁴ (see Gergen, 1985). Critical reflections also targeted subdisciplines of psychology such as developmental psychology (Broughton, 1987; Burman, 1994; Morss, 1992; Teo, 1997; Walkerdine, 1988) or social psychology (Cherry, 1995; Gergen 1994a; Parker, 1989; Parker & Shotter, 1990; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wexler, 1996).¹⁵

It has been emphasized that these perspectives of psychology are not mutually exclusive and that interests, premises, and goals overlap. In that sense the differentiation is a cognitive tool in order to understand history, theory, and conflicts more adequately. That there is overlap can be best understood by looking at individual biographies. A psychologist may be able to work with all perspectives, either simultaneously or at different stages of his or her career (see Teo, 1999a). Some researchers point out that critical reflections arrive later in academic life (Oeser, 1988), that there may be a season for theory in psychology (Ross, Febbraro, Thoms-Chesley, Bauer, & Lubek, 1996), or a *maturity shift* towards reflection late in one's career (Edwards & Endler, 1987). Although numerous examples could be found for a movement from natural-scientific psychology towards a critical approach, I would like to draw attention to two remarkable figures: Sigmund Koch (1917–1996) became an outstanding critic of psychology (compare Koch, 1959–1963, versus Koch, 1981). Jan Smedslund moved from a natural-scientific understanding of psychology to a critical one that identified pseudo-empirical dimensions of psychology (compare Smedslund, 1963 and Smedslund, 1994). Yet, psychologists might as well defend and promote one perspective during their entire

careers. There is no reason, perhaps only institutional constraints, why psychologists should not work with natural-scientific, human-scientific, and critical perspectives at all stages of their career.

Recognition is achieved by psychologists who have worked in the system of natural-scientific psychology while considering human-scientific concerns that are of greater interest to the general educated public. A famous example would be Sigmund Freud, who was trained in the natural sciences as a physiologist and had a natural-scientific attitude when studying psychological phenomena (see Fancher, 1973). At the same time Freud's approach functioned, and still functions widely, as a human-scientific approach, and contemporary natural-scientifically inclined psychologists do not consider psychoanalysis scientific anymore. Yet, the human-scientific Freud provided meaning for individuals and communities by elucidating cultural products such as art and jokes and their meaning in everyday life and allowed for the application of psychoanalytic ideas to film, literature, and popular culture. Another well known example is Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904–1990), a representative of a natural science approach, who articulated some of his ideas in novels and popular magazines (e.g., Skinner, 1971; see Rutherford, 2003). Given his human-scientific interests, which he separated from his natural-scientific ones, it is not surprising that Skinner drew much more public attention to his person than did the neo-behaviorists Clark L. Hull (1884–1952) or Edward C. Tolman (1886–1959).

The suggested differentiation of psychology into different perspectives is based on history, and ongoing traditions, but also on the characteristic of the psychological subject matter. From a *normative* point of view, one could argue that the perspectives require a kind of equilibrium among each other (see Teo, 1999a). The idea of such equilibrium among the perspectives does not mean that psychologists should not discuss problems in each perspective. On the one hand human-scientific psychology may take a critical stance when challenging parts of natural-scientific psychology as not addressing problems of genuine human psychology, or when suggesting that its research is lacking in ethical reflection. On the other hand, natural-scientific psychology may take a critical stance when arguing that parts of human-scientific psychology are based on speculation and that human-scientific psychology is close to popular psychology. Such discussions might provide the launch for discussion on how methodologies are understood differently in the human and natural sciences. From a normative point, equilibrium among the perspectives of psychology would mean that there should be space for reflection on the discipline and for asking critical questions.

Based on these *idealtypic* reconstructions one might gain the impression that the natural-scientific and human-scientific perspectives have the same status in academia. From a *factual* point of view, which addresses issues of power, it is evident that these perspectives are not on an equal footing. Natural-scientific psychology's history is a history of becoming mainstream, which also means that important aspects and dimensions of human psychological life are neglected (from the perspective of human-scientific psychology). And history has taught that a colonization of all branches of psychology are not beneficial to psychology in terms of ontology, epistemology, and ethics, and that a colonization of the whole field, as perpetrated for instance by behaviorism, does not lead to an advancement of knowledge. Problems also arise when studies of problematization are presented and justified as natural-scientific ones. This becomes most evident in psychologists' involvement with the study of "race" and in the lack of reflection on epistemological (ontological and ethical) assumptions (see Teo & Febbraro, 2003). If one treats "race" as a "natural quality" and not as a socially, culturally, and historically constructed concept, then one will reproduce a sociohistorical meaning construction (see also Danziger, 1997a). Although admittedly, such a construction (e.g., the inferiority of Blacks) may give meaning to certain communities, it has not much to do with authentic natural science.

Natural-scientific psychology's colonization process of human-scientific psychology and of the mainstream is not a question of better evidence. According to the analysis of Ward (2002), psychology could have become part of the humanities. That it did not, can be linked with politics because "it makes no sense to attach oneself to fields that are weak" (p. 56) or areas that are perceived to be weak. On the other hand the dominance of natural-scientific psychology in the mainstream has led to a situation where most critical reflection focuses on problems of mainstream psychology. Thus, this book will concentrate more on the critique of natural-scientific psychology and mainstream psychology, and address issues of relevance. Unfortunately, critical psychology may be diminishing its reflections on mainstream psychology, as critical studies are targeted towards the small minority of critical psychologists or as critical psychology is becoming an institutional division within the discipline. Positively, this would mean that psychologists who specialize in natural-scientific psychology could learn about human-scientific psychology and critical reflections. Negatively, an institutionalization of critical perspectives might lead to the delegation of reflection. In any case, a lack of critical self-reflection might result in psychology being an unaware discipline that is prone to self-misunderstandings and defense mechanisms.

PSYCHOLOGY AS A PROBLEMATIC SCIENCE

Given the three contradictory perspectives of psychology that are still in existence in academia, expressing problems of the discipline while at the same time challenging each other on a recurring basis, it is understandable that researchers have labeled psychology a problematic science (see also Woodward & Ash, 1982). Psychology became a problematic science because of the fundamental differences in conceptualizing the subject matter, methodology, and the relevance of psychology among the various perspectives in psychology. Psychology being a problematic science is also the precondition for a history and theory of the critique of psychology. The forms and contents of a specific critique depend on the perspective that is taken regarding mental life.

Natural-scientific perspectives challenged the metaphysical character of human-scientific psychology, whereas human-scientific perspectives challenged the reductionistic character of natural-scientific psychology, and ethical-political perspectives in psychology disputed the relevance of both of these. Moreover, the problematic character of psychology stems from opposing perspectives that suggest problem solutions exclusively in terms of a particular perspective. From the perspective of natural-scientific psychology, the lack of natural-scientific precision is responsible for the problems of psychology, a situation that should be overcome through more scientific rigor, formalization, and natural-scientific conceptualization. From the perspective of human-scientific psychology, the problem lies in what is considered the solution in natural-scientific psychology: The conceptualization of psychology as a natural science is the problem because it does not do justice to the specific subject matter of psychology, and the unique, fundamentally and qualitatively different relationship between researcher and research object in psychology and the natural sciences. From such a perspective, a problem solution strategy would endorse the development of psychology as a human science.

Despite these differences in points of view, one is able to identify some crucial factors around which some of the most important critiques have centered in the last two centuries. From a historical as well as theoretical point of view, problems can be analyzed in terms of three basic complexes: the subject matter of psychology, the methodology of psychology, and the relevance of psychology (for practice or for the powerless). These three factors are not independent of one another because a commitment to a particular methodology might determine a particular understanding of the subject matter, and a commitment to a subject matter (e.g., behavior) entices a commitment to a certain methodology. Further, both may be closely related to the problem of relevance. In a

general sense these three basic problems parallel discussions in three philosophical disciplines: The problem of subject matter is an ontological issue; the problem of methodology is an epistemological matter; and the problem of relevance shares problems of ethics.

As emphasized when dealing with the perspectives of psychology, these three factors around which problem assessments (historical and theoretical) are focused are a heuristic tool to organize the vast material on the critique of psychology.¹⁶ These three factors are a scaffolding based on which critiques of psychology have been chosen. For the description of the problematic discourses of psychology it is less important to understand the number of factors and the role of factors. Such a reflection would become crucial when it comes to a crisis intervention program, and when discrimination between substance and phenomena of the problematic status and the crisis is substantial. For example, if one assumes that the theory–practice problem of psychology (lack of practical relevance) is the substance of the crisis, then one would use a different problem solution program from the one used if one assumes that the subject matter is the problem.¹⁷ Problems of subject matter, methodology, and relevance are expressed in several phenomena although one should realize that any problem assessment depends on the psychological perspective. For example, from a natural-scientific perspective any philosophical conceptualization of the subject matter of psychology is the problem, whereas from a human-scientific psychology the narrow conceptualization of the subject matter of psychology is the problem.

I will list phenomenologically some critical discussions regarding ontology and epistemology, whereas ethical-political perspectives will be treated in detail in Chapters 6–9. An often-mentioned phenomenon of the crisis, in my analysis closely related to the issue of subject matter, and shared by psychologists of all systems, is the problem of the *synchronic missing unity of psychology* (see also Staats & Mos, 1987), which Willy (1899) already identified at the end of the 19th century. From the perspective of human-scientific psychology, the discipline can be characterized as producing small and isolated empirical results that lack theoretical integration and have no concrete significance for the meaning-seeking person. But even from a natural-scientific perspective the lack of theoretical integration or unification of psychology, solely within a natural-scientific perspective, is a major problem (Staats, 1991). This lack of unification, which also indicates the lack of *paradigmatic* status of mainstream psychology, is a significant problem for natural-scientific psychology, because it follows the lead of the seemingly unified (certainly paradigmatic) status of the natural sciences. Given that human-scientific psychology includes the historicity of psychological knowledge, unification is, in my

view, less a problem. In philosophy, no expert considers unifying the diverse field of philosophy, with its different worldviews, as a meaningful goal, and if psychology is more a philosophical than a natural-scientific discipline, then the issue of unification would not be a problem (see Chapter 4).

In addition, if one assumes that the two basic programs of psychology are incompatible in terms of their understanding of subject matter and methodology, then the problem of the unification of those two perspectives is impossible. Unification is theoretically achievable, if at all, not between the basic perspectives, but only within each perspective. Yet, a potential unification of natural-scientific psychology would even strengthen the exclusion of human-scientific psychology. On the other hand, any premature theoretical rejection of unification (Krantz, 1987) seems unwarranted. Indeed, historians point to a lack of historical understanding in discourses of unification (e.g., Richards, 2002).¹⁸ Missing unity is also found regarding geographical areas. For example, American psychology, which has become dominant in the 20th century, can be compared to German-speaking psychology that has a long hermeneutic tradition and includes philosophy, history, anthropology, and other human sciences, and which rejected on an ongoing basis Americanized psychology (see also Tolman, 1989, 1994, 2001).

Hand in hand with this synchronic disunity of psychology goes a diachronic *stagnation of knowledge*, meaning the lack of unambiguous growth of knowledge in both natural-scientific and human-scientific psychology, both of which have accumulated a vast amount of empirical information. From a critical point of view, the many statistically significant results of natural-scientific psychology have ambiguous theoretical meanings because they are based on the proliferation of incompatible theories and research programs operating with different models of the human being and different research practices (see Holzkamp, 1983). Wilhelm Wundt's (1832–1920) introspective experimental psychology was very different from contemporary experimental psychology; yet, Wundt's experiments have not been falsified. They are ignored because psychology developed different research views and practices. And cognitive psychology ignores the huge amount of empirical results of behaviorism, not because all of them have been disconfirmed, but because of a different focus.

From a realist epistemological point of view, the form and content of a thought should be able to represent characteristics of an object or an event. However, this representation is intertwined with interests and constellations outside and inside the institution of psychology. It is clear that the implicit or explicit conceptualization, model, metaphor, or theory of

the psyche determines or influences what a researcher can and wants to see, and how he or she can or wants to do research (method), which emphasizes that the conceptualization of the psyche, of mental life, and of the subject matter is a central scientific problem and an issue of controversy and critique. There is an intimate interconnection between theory and empirical research in the sense that a particular conceptualization leads to results within this conceptualization and that the conceptualization itself, as a presupposition, is not tested (see also Holzkamp, 1983). For perspectives of psychology this means that natural-scientific psychology produces empirical research based on a natural-scientific self-understanding, whereas human-scientific psychology produces empirical knowledge based on its premises.

For natural-scientific psychology I suggest that hypothesis testing, as esteemed as it might be, is not really a test, but rather an illustration of hypotheses that make sense within a particular research program. As such it becomes the goal of the researcher to produce circumstances and conditions in which a hypothesis is not rejected. Instead of the acknowledgement of incompatible worldviews, human-scientific psychology repeats the argument that the highest level of the psyche, what is traditionally called consciousness or subjectivity, cannot be explored sufficiently when chemical processes in the brain are studied, that subjectivity is not clarified when only the behavior of a person is investigated, and that a research method that might be very helpful on a biochemical or physiological level cannot automatically be transferred to human mental life. Instead of the acknowledgement of incompatible worldviews, natural-scientific psychology is left with the argument that psychology as a human science is not objective, reliable, and value-neutral.

The fragmentation of mental life into parts, or faculties as they used to be called, in natural-scientific psychology is not simply an intellectual course of action that fell from the sky in the process of the triumph of the natural sciences, but has its sources in social contexts (see Ash & Geuter, 1985; Lück, Grünwald, Geuter, R. Miller, & Rechtién, 1987; Jansz & Drunen, 2004). Staeuble (1985) pointed out, from a social-historical perspective, that the particularization of mental life paralleled the development of institutions in the consolidation of modern capitalist societies. In the educational system power, discipline, obedience, achievement, and so on count; in the health system health problems are identified and repaired individually; and in the legal system the accountability of perpetrators and the reliability of testimonies are of interest. This constellation of research successes of the natural sciences of physiology, physics, and chemistry on the one hand, and the political-historical development of society and its institutions on the other hand, led to a positivist understanding of psychology. No longer was

an understanding of mental life of interest, but rather a positivist explanation, which meant the “functional relationships between variables” (M. H. Marx, 1951, p. 6); (see also Winston, 2001). Such a reconstruction is of course already the perspective of a critical history.

The reflexive critique of the conceptualization of the subject matter of traditional natural-scientific psychology takes two forms. The epistemological and ontological critique refers to an inadequate conceptualization of the subject matter of psychology, for example, in using machine metaphors in order to study human mental life, a very important tradition in psychology (see Sullivan, 1984). It is criticized that the human subject is wrongly conceptualized as a passive and reactive machine, driven by causes, with components that can be added up (such as nature and nurture). The machine metaphor is attractive as the many technological changes enable new psychological theories based on technological innovations (from the clock and engine to the computer). The ethical-political critique argues that psychology reproduces the functionality of subjects and, in doing so, supports the status quo of society, and that psychology reproduces an alienated, individualized, male European, while at the same time the factors that lead to alienation, individualization, and ethnocentrism are neglected (see also Habermas, 1968).

More extensive than ontological issues surrounding the subject matter are discourses attacking the methodology of mainstream psychology, the second theme regarding the problems of psychology. Natural-scientific psychology has developed several arguments against human-scientific psychology, and, with a degree of zealotry, against psychoanalysis. However, most critiques regarding psychology as a natural science target the methodology of mainstream psychology. From a critical perspective, one would have to describe an investigative practice that conceptualizes the subject matter by the way the method prescribes it, as *methodologism* (Teo, 1993), a concept similar to the one used by Bakan (1961/1967), *methodolatry* (p. 158), to denote the worship of method. In a similar vein, Toulmin and Leary (1985) referred to the *cult of empiricism* and Danziger (1985) called it the *methodological imperative*.

Methodologism means that the method dominates the problem, problems are chosen in subordination of the respected method, and psychology has to adopt without question, the methods of the natural sciences. Historically, it is understandable that the methodology of the successful natural sciences was very attractive to psychologists and methods appeared as the source with which the scientific status and credibility of psychology could be guaranteed. Even Freud, the most influential representative of a human-scientific psychology, expected solutions to the theoretical and practical problems of psychology to come through the

natural sciences (see Habermas, 1972). From the perspective of a human-scientific psychology and a critical psychology, a science should choose its method according to its problems and its subject matter. One could even say that the adequacy of the methodology with regard to the subject matter should be a central scientific criterion, and as long as the adequacy of a method for the subject matter is not known the scientific value and all other objectification criteria are ambiguous (Holzkamp, 1983).

The methodologism of natural-scientific psychology causes various subproblems. From an epistemological and ontological-critical as well as from a human-scientific perspective the experiment in psychology has limited value (for example, only for basic psychological processes), given the nature of the psychological subject matter, and the reality of persons and their capacities.¹⁹ Along with this discussion goes the critique of mainstream psychology's identity as a nomothetic science for which causal connection between conditions and effects is central. As a nomothetic discipline psychology should provide universal laws, explanations, and predictions. Yet, not many results in psychology qualify as universal laws especially when it comes to higher psychological processes. From a constructivist point of view, the supposed causal processes are in fact constructed by the researcher (Holzkamp, 1968).

More recent critiques have argued that psychology takes reasons for causes and that empirical hypothesis testing is not a test but an application of good reasons (Holzkamp, 1986), that in several important psychological investigations if-then-statements have implicative character (Brandtstädter et al., 1994), that psychology is not an empirical science because valid statements in psychology are explications of common sense and hence necessarily true (Smedslund, 1988, 1994), or that experiments (in social psychology) are circular and produce unfalsifiable truisms (Wallach & Wallach, 2001). Studies that attempt to test necessarily true statements are labeled pseudo-empirical (Smedslund, 1995). It appears that hypothesis testing and experimental arrangements are a challenge to the skill of the experimenter in constructing time, space, and population, but not a test in its very meaning. Finally, operational definitions, which appear to natural-scientific psychology as a huge advantage because they are able to overcome metaphysical definitions, appear from the perspective of a critical psychology as an inflation of definitions. Indeed, Percy W. Bridgman's (1882–1961) original intentions were not really applicable to psychology (see Green, 1992). Other issues concern practices such as using statistics as a tool for exploration in order to find significant differences, which is not disclosed in publications, and, in any case, the publication of nonsignificant results in psychology is rare.

I have distinguished a critical psychology that focuses on epistemology and ontology, and a critical psychology that focuses on ethical-political

issues, but they are often combined which can be seen in the second half of this book. From the perspective of a critical psychology that emphasizes the relevance issue, a lack of reflection on the ethical-political domain hinders psychology from becoming a meaningful science. Lack of relevance of psychology refers to the lack of practical relevance of natural-scientific as well as human-scientific psychology. It has been argued that the progress in statistics and experimental design, and the help of increasingly complex software for data analysis, is in reverse proportion to being able to apply the results to real world contexts (Holzkamp, 1972). Lack of relevance also means that natural-scientific psychology has no relevance for suffering or oppressed persons (while it may be relevant to the powerful in society). Lack of relevance also suggests that psychology is not relevant to women because psychology is a male-dominated discipline, to visible minorities because of a history of racism, and to non-Western cultures.

Some problems in the ethical-political context refer to ideological influences on psychological theory and practice. From the perspective of natural-scientific psychology ideological influences are expressed when psychologists have a political conscience in psychology. From the perspective of psychologists who emphasize the ethical-political dimension in the context of discovery or even the context of justification, the repression of the ethical-political domain is the central problem. Persons live and act always on the background of a sociohistorical and cultural context, and such a fact makes psychology prone to ideological influences. For example, clinical psychologists (trained in the natural sciences or in the human sciences) are pressured from insurance companies in a way that psychology loses emancipatory relevance. In the Marxist critique of relevance, mainstream psychology represents the beliefs and ideas of a dominating class; in the feminist critique, the worldview of men; and in the postcolonial critique, the interests of white Americans and Europeans. Cultural critics have argued that the dominance of American psychology has to do with the economic power of the US (Parker, 1989).

Given the variety of problems that psychology faces, there should be no doubt that psychology as a discipline needs a systematic reflection on ontology, epistemology, and ethics. In the following chapters, some of these problems will be presented more systematically. The following chapters focus on early critiques of psychology followed by the natural-scientific critique of psychology, and the human-scientific critique of psychology, and the critiques of relevance center around the Marxist, feminist, postmodern, and postcolonial discourses of psychology.

The Critique of Psychology
From Kant to Postcolonial Theory

Teo, Th.

2005, XII, 240 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-387-25355-8