

# Preface

Research and teaching in the history of psychology are in a challenging position. For some psychologists, history has not just significance but fundamental standing. Yet, most psychologists, it may well be, do not think history has much to say directly to them. In this collection of essays, we seek to raise the level of discussion about what the standing should be. For this purpose, we have to keep in view both the intellectual arguments about the relation of history to a science and profession of psychology and the practical, or political and administrative, conditions that currently affect the time and resources given to history of psychology. At first glance, historical work appears vulnerable to dismissal from psychologists seeking to advance scientific knowledge, especially in a field like neuropsychology where there is much optimism about the productivity of experimental work. Further, in competition with scientific fields or professional activities claiming direct impact, history is not likely to come out well. We think there is something—indeed, many things—wrong with this situation. We have assembled essays to say why.

Questions concerning intellectual significance and questions concerning resources are, at base, interconnected. All the same, it requires different rhetoric, different forms of argument, to address presumptions about scientific significance and to address administrative/political issues. We try to take account of this. Further, we bear in mind that the situation history of psychology faces is not unique: both the troubles and the arguments tie in with debates concerning the relations of history to science (including social science) generally. This, in turn, is part of the larger debate about the place of the humanities disciplines, which politically driven funding decisions have made a live issue in a number of countries.

Publishing these essays in *Annals of Theoretical Psychology*, we of course primarily have an audience of psychologists in mind—though it would be good if a broader audience were to take up the discussion (and the papers are generally accessible to a broader audience). As is proper, we have authors for whom discussion about the theoretical foundations of psychology is paramount, and we have authors for whom the argument proceeds through specific historical, context-dependent positions. The issues are international, and the authors international too (from ten countries), though no one would claim that the contributors are “representative”

(whatever that might mean) of all opinions and national settings. The collection is certainly not restricted in interest to those who might in some way identify themselves as historians of psychology (a group that perhaps really only has a professionalized presence among psychologists as a speciality in North America, however many contributors there may be to the field from around the world). We intend the collection to be open-minded, liberal in spirit, and to bring together arguments which are otherwise widely scattered. Make no mistake, though: our authors are definite and articulate in their views, at times hard-hitting. The primary purpose is to upgrade discussion and provide a resource on which others will wish to draw.

For this reason, the editors asked the authors to be concrete and, notably, if the claim is that history has consequences for the practice of psychology in the present, to say how, with particulars. If there is a causal relation between history and psychological work, let us see what it is. And, if there is not—as we think many psychologists would presume—let us see clearly where that leaves claims about the value of history.

Most of the authors of the existing literature defending the occupation of history of psychology are psychologists, working in institutional settings where they think what they do is threatened. They have cause: many psychologists think history of little or no value compared to the advance of science or practical training, and university business managers and, beyond them, politicians operate with a financial framework that puts the squeeze on history. The concern is international—Spain, the United States, and Britain come immediately to mind, though there appear to be countries, perhaps Brazil, where the history of psychology is relatively untroubled. This background, added to the interest in establishing more systematic theory in psychology which underlies the series as a whole, led the series editors to suggest the topic and the editors of this volume to ask psychologists (broadly understood) to say precisely in what way they believe history has consequences for contemporary psychological research or practice. If those who do history of psychology demand an audience of psychologists, let them prove the point! This volume of *Annals* brings together papers that attempt just this.

The collection divides fairly naturally into three parts, the first relating more to general intellectual issues and the second focusing more on specific historical cases that demonstrate history's significance. In fact, there is a considerable overlap, as we think there should be, since it is certainly central to the art of history to combine what is of general interest with the particular.

"*History of Psychology—What for?*" (Roger Smith), a review of the types of argument used on behalf of historical work, opens the volume. The purpose is to provide a classification, or scheme, for the many arguments scattered about the literature. The author drafted his ideas and then rewrote them in the light of the contributions. This chapter, therefore, serves as an introduction and overview of the collection as a whole. The next paper, "The Universal and the Particular in Psychology and the Role of History in Explaining Both" (Adrian Brock), identifies one large but specific philosophical issue separating the positions psychologists and historians of psychology often put forward, the concern of the former with

explanatory universals and the concern of the latter with interpretive particulars. Two chapters then deal directly with the potential contribution of the history of psychology to advancing a general, systematic science, that is, a theoretically grounded psychology. “Six Meanings of the History of Science: The Case of Psychology” (Aaro Toomela) forcefully expresses a number of the reasons laid out in the introductory chapter, but it does so by concentrating on what history can do, and indeed must do, for *science*. In this way, the paper goes to the heart of the reasoning in the implicit or explicit neglect of history by psychologists. “Beyond the ‘Variables’: Developing Metalanguage for Psychology” (Jaan Valsiner and Svend Brinkmann) takes up a central element of this with a criticism of the place of variables in the scientific discourse of psychology, along with a positive program to upgrade theory construction. The two remaining papers in Part I, in illuminating contrast to this concern with the theory of science, turn to the practical circumstances in which academic psychologists have to work. “The Shackles of Practice: History of Psychology, Research Assessment, and the Curriculum” (Alan Collins and Geoff Bunn) is a precise dissection of the conditions in Britain—but with their close parallels elsewhere—in which psychologists who are also teachers of the history of psychology have to work. These conditions make for a troubled field, and the authors, with unprecedented clarity, show what this means. “History for ‘Polycentric’ Psychological Science: An ‘Outsider’s’ Case” (Irina Mironenko) raises large questions concerning what history of psychology might mean for those many psychologists who work often in the English language, though it is not their own, and for audiences that are not, in the first place, the one in the Anglo-American world which, by weight of numbers and by access to resources, is dominant. In Russia, the rapid spread of psychological thought and practices in society imposes special demands; and there is also the legacy of a distinctive intellectual culture.

Part II includes contributions that, while not exactly case studies, provide exemplifications of history at work. This begins with “The Dominant as a Model of Chronogenic Change: The Relevance of A. A. Ukhtomsky’s and L. S. Vygotsky’s Traditions for Systemic Cognitive Studies” (Andres Kurismaa and Lucia P. Pavlova), which takes up a specific claim for the value of a past body of research for contemporary cognitive science, and it does this in terms scientific psychologists themselves may directly assess. Here is our contribution with the most developed direct claim for the causal importance of history to empirical as well as theoretical science (though neither the authors nor the other contributors to the volume would think of observation and theory as independent). “Constructiveness in the History of Psychology: Frederic Bartlett from Past to Future” (Brady Wagoner) takes up the research of the British experimental psychologist Frederic Bartlett, mainly from the 1920s and 1930s of the twentieth century, as an object lesson on how knowledge of history may suggest a model of practice, rather than a source of particular findings, relevant for psychological science. The next chapter turns to a much more politicized topic for psychologists: “A History of Psychology’s Complicated Relationship to Feminism: Theorizing Difference” (H. Lorraine Radtke and Henderikus J. Stam). Here is well shown just how many aspects of history may be at work in debates about psychology’s content and practices. It is indeed impossible to conceive of

debate about sex/gender differences without reference to the history of the debates that have already occurred. “Autonomy, Theory, and ‘Applied’ versus ‘Basic’: Work Psychology and Its Search for Identity in Finland, ca. 1945–2000” (Petteri Pietikäinen) develops a distinctively social argument for history, though an argument that psychologists of all persuasions will surely recognize. The current practices, social arrangements, and place in social policy decisions of psychology are contingent on events in local, or at least national, settings. We simply cannot know what conditions psychologists work in, or why, without historical knowledge. The last chapter in this section, “Subjectivity in the History of Psychology—A Systematic or a Historical Challenge?” (Sven Hroar Klempe), examines the highly problematic, and equally demanding, question of the place of subjectivity as the subject matter of psychology. The center of the paper is Kiergekaard’s conception of psychology as the science of subjectivity, but the argument ranges widely in order to demonstrate just what a complex understanding of the history is needed if there is to be a place for subjectivity in the field, as many people who are not professional psychologists, but look to psychology for some kind of insight, expect.

In a concluding section, we include two commentaries (Annette Mülberger; Sergio Salvatore), as a way to suggest the opening up of dialogue on the issues the chapters raise. We are well aware that much more might be said; we hope that bringing arguments together in one place, as we do here, will help make history the serious consideration it must be for psychology to flourish.

The editors, one a musicologist and psychologist and the other an intellectual historian and historian of science, record their pleasure and interest in sharing work in shaping the volume and in being invited by the series editors to do so. They owe a large debt to the contributors, all of whom, under pressure of other demands, have in so positive a way taken up this project. We warmly thank them.

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