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[Introduction to] A Century of Psychology as Science

Sigmund Koch

David E. Leary

University of Richmond, dleary@richmond.edu

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A CENTURY OF

PSYCHOLOGY
AS SCIENCE

EDITED BY
SIGMUND KOCH & DAVID E. LEARY

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
WASHINGTON, DC

Introduction

SIGMUND KOCH

DAVID E. LEARY

As is well known, the centenary of Wundt's establishment of the Leipzig laboratory was taken by the American Psychological Association (and other groups of psychologists within and outside of the United States) as occasion for the formal celebration of the "hundredth anniversary" of scientific psychology. The American Psychological Association sponsored many activities in recognition of the anniversary, and its 1979 national convention, held in New York City (September 1-5), made the centenary its official theme. The senior editor of this book happened to be president of two divisions of the Association during 1979: the Division of General Psychology (Division 1) and the Division of Philosophical Psychology (24). As one who had given a long career to the analysis of theoretical, methodological, and philosophical problems of psychology, it was natural for him to see the possibility of using the bulk of the convention program time allotted to these two divisions as a vehicle for a serious and comprehensive assessment of the state of the field at the end of its "first" century. The junior editor, whose research efforts have been concentrated on the history of psychology, proved willing to assume the capacity of joint program chairman of the two divisions. Working closely together, we designed a carefully structured program of symposia and invited lectures entitled *A Century of Psychology as Science: Retrospections and Assessments*, and had the great good luck to attract the collaboration of forty-six symposiasts (and twenty chairpersons) whose names read much like an honor roll in the psychological and cognate disciplines.

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The objective of the symposium series was, of course, to promote a searching backward look at the successes and failures of scientific psychology's first century and a creative effort to discern its prospects as it enters its second. Our distinguished symposiasts were offered total latitude in their choice of role (whether historian, prophet, or somewhere in between), and in the mode of its implementation. Most of them were leaders in some region of the highly specialized tissue of psychological inquiry, and they were asked to focus upon their own fields. Others were distinguished individuals in fields that intersect with psychology, among both the sciences and the humanities; these persons were asked to view aspects of the psychological enterprise from the perspective of their own interests.

No doubt because of the challenge inherent in the ceremonial occasion—and the added circumstance that publication was contemplated from the beginning—participants in the symposium series on which this book is based approached their tasks in high earnest. The result was a program of unusual quality for any scholarly convention. It is to be emphasized, however, that the book is not a "proceedings" but a carefully prepared scholarly work. Virtually all of the papers have been revised in accordance with editorial suggestions made by the senior editor; most include extensive bibliographies and also "supplementary readings" listing landmark publications which register the development of the field under consideration.

After a hundred years of ebullient growth, psychology has achieved a condition at once so fractionated and so ramified as to preclude any two persons agreeing as to its "architecture." Even if an architecture could be reliably discerned, it is doubtful that all of its substructures could be addressed in any single study having a chance of completion before the dawn of psychology's *third* century. To vary the image, current psychology is much like a jumbled "hidden-figure" puzzle that contains no figure. Thus we cannot claim representativeness, still less completeness, for the collection of fields and issues chosen for the originating symposium series and, later, for this book. We did make an effort to include most of the larger, traditionally discriminated subdivisions of fundamental psychology (e.g., perception, learning, motivation, emotion, development, personality, social psychology) and the more prominent intersectional areas (e.g., psychology and mathematics, psychology and philosophy, psychology and neuroscience, psychology and evolutionary biology). Moreover, a number of contributors were asked to confront problems of general systematic import, and another subgroup—including humanists as well as psychologists—inquired into the human impact of psychology. All we can claim is that a sufficient range of historically significant fields and interests were sifted through a sufficient diversity of authoritative sensibilities to provide a telling fix on the state of psychology on the threshold of its second century.

Some major constraints on the representativeness of this book are suggested by considerations that will be addressed in the senior editor's *Foreword*.

1. Evidence will be presented which suggests that the American hegemony in psychology—so patent over a large interval of this century—is decreasing. When, in the early 1950s, the senior editor designed *Psychology: A Study of a Science* (McGraw-Hill, 1959–1963), it was possible for a massive study of the status of psychology to claim adequate representativeness in respect to the discipline, even though the ninety contributing authors (selected on grounds of influence) included only two Europeans and one Canadian. Not a single foreign reviewer of that six-volume enterprise commented on any lack of international representativeness, or even found its overwhelmingly American authorship worthy of comment. One can doubt that the degree of American dominance betokened by such circumstances still prevails. If North America is still the Rome of international psychology in respect to the size of its work force, it is certainly not Athens in respect to its leadership in ideas.

We thus count our failure to include non-American contributors within the present book a distinct limit. All that can be said by way of extenuation is that the time limits—and the fiscal ones—for arranging the originating symposia on which the book is based precluded the invitation of foreign participants. Fortunately, however, the historical reach of many of our contributors extends far past the cozy borders of the United States. Ethnocentrism will not be found a conspicuous trait in the chapters of this book!

2. Evidence will be adduced to document a massive realignment of activity in “fundamental” versus “implemental” (i.e., professional and applied) psychology that has taken place, on a world-wide basis, in recent decades. On that dimension, the representation of fields and topics in this book may be said to be almost perversely skewed. It is. But this selectivity has been a matter of policy!

The *raison d'être* of the book is the centenary of psychology qua science. Whether the institutionalization of such a discipline be attributed to Wundt or, more generally, to a congeries of late-nineteenth-century developments pointing in a similar direction, the *psychology* at issue was perceived as a “pure,” nomothetic, largely laboratory-oriented science which would serve as the foundation discipline of all the human or social sciences. And, on the Wundtian scheme, *Völkerpsychologie*, however nonlaboratory-like or “historical” its methods must be, was also presumed a “pure” discipline. Such a conception of psychology was the lineal progenitor of the vastly altered psychology of the present day. Thus the focus of this book is upon the *fate* of that kind of psychology—psychology qua science—over the past century. If part of its fate has indeed been a diminution of interest in fundamental relative to implemental psychology, *that* is a circumstance worth documenting and pondering. If the activities pursued under the banner of psychology have changed, differentiated, regrouped in ways far outside the range of Wundt's (or the pioneers') anticipations, that, too, is of deep significance. The strategy of choice

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for the illumination of such matters can only be that of tracing the jagged and extralogical storyline of "scientific psychology" as it branches out from the founding conception.

In this book we have thus concentrated on the representation of fields and issues relating to "fundamental" psychology in some sense of that open-horizon word. One large tradition which developed out of the clinic rather than the scientific psychology of the academy—that of psychoanalytic and dynamic psychologies—will soon merit a centennial volume (or encyclopaedia) of its own. Though the treatment of dynamic psychology in a book such as this must necessarily be a limited one, readers will find its interrelations with fundamental psychology well documented in the chapters of Rosenzweig on experimental psychoanalysis, Sears on psychoanalysis and behavior theory, and of both Sanford and Mischel on personality. The relations of fundamental psychology to human and social affairs are directly represented by the contributions of Chorover and Braginsky, and considerations bearing on the relations between fundamental and implemental psychology are rarely absent in the other chapters of this volume. They are focal in certain of the chapters contributed by our philosophical contingent, such as those of MacIntyre and Zaner.

Broader *direct* representation of the implemental areas would certainly have been desirable, but even an adequate sampling of fundamental psychology is impossible within the limits of any single volume, however ample. We would emphasize, however, that perhaps the most weighty rationale for our concentration upon fundamental psychology is the widespread presumption that what "implemental" psychology implements is, indeed, fundamental psychology. Though a scattering of implemental psychologists have been entertaining doubts about this dependency, the mainstream view of the connection is still very much like the stereotype which presumes engineering to be a wholly derivative and uniquely determined application of "pure" physics. Natural science methodologists already agree that the case for physics and engineering may be far more complicated than the formerly regnant stereotype. It is possible that the case for fundamental-implemental relations in psychology may be even more intricate. Professional and applied psychologists cannot fail to be interested in coming to terms with that issue!

The contents of the book omit but a few of the topics included in the originating symposia, but their sequencing has been rearranged. George Miller's chapter on "The Constitutive Problem of Psychology" was generously written for the book despite the fact that he had been unable to participate in the APA program. Margaret Hagen (also not a symposiast) was equally kind in agreeing to serve as surrogate for James J. Gibson in writing an expository chapter on his important "ecological" theory of perception. The editors had planned to ask Professor Gibson to supplement his laconic but superb critique of "sensation-based" perception theory with a positive statement of his views, but this was precluded by the sad event

of his death. Another chapter not based on the original symposium series is Robert Sears's historical overview of "Psychoanalysis and Behavior Theory."

The editorial aim was to secure multiplicity of viewpoint, analytic attack, and style. We hoped for papers that would have a fresh and direct "first person" authenticity rather than be cautious and ritualistic exercises in scholarly apologetics. The results, we think, justify such a hope. The chapters vary widely in the type of task embraced by the author, in style, length, and point of view. The fact that quite a few of the chapters are of moderate length is a boon in several senses—not the least significant of which is that historical assessments cut closer to the bone when not blurred by too much qualifying detail. What the volume projects is the "first century" as filtered through the differing sensibilities and attitudinal frames of intellectually responsible men and women who are very much their own persons and who, for the occasion, are willing to speak with minimal indirection. Moreover, the centennial context did elicit a disposition to inhibit a certain kind of ideational imperialism and truculence that is not unknown in scholarship, and to be uncommonly frank and searching in the delineation of intellectual limits (sometimes limits painful to the writer!) within recent history. We are given, in short, a living registration of psychology *moving* into its second century, rather than an ornate mausoleum in static celebration of its first.

Some insight into the special qualities of this work can be gleaned by comparing it with the large study of the status of psychology at mid-century issuing in the six volumes of *Psychology: A Study of a Science*. The present book can in some ways be seen as a miniature *Psychology: A Study of a Science*, a second probe into the condition of psychology after a quarter-century more of flux. But happily, we think, for the reader, it is a study of far less formal cast. The rather interventionistic editorial methods of the former venture (which sought to ensure uniformity of analytic incidence and something like ultimate detail in the elaboration of arguments) were not deemed appropriate to the present one. Our editorial aim in this project has been to foster heterogeneity, to enhance the timbre of each individual voice, by serving the particular objectives set by each contributor. If a degree of cacophony results, that, too, can teach us much about our curious discipline. Better still, it will enhance and sustain the high interest merited by every page of this book.

The book does not pretend to be a *history* of scientific psychology—far from it! It comprises the variegated efforts of many expert minds to gauge the condition of their special fields at the *end* of the first century. If there is any central emphasis to the questioning, it is *where do we stand at the present time?*—in relation, of course, to the historically constituted objectives of the "new" psychology and the hopes of the founders. Thus the current enterprise—or "study" if you will—is primarily present-centered, and from that center it is as much forward-looking as it is backward-looking. The individual contributors have themselves determined the direc-

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tion of their glance. Some seek to illumine the present primarily by looking toward the past; others concentrate on what they consider fruitful leads, located either in their own thinking or some more general tendency in their field, which they believe to contain an intimation of the future. Almost all look in *both* directions, but with *varying emphases*.

This study, then, may be seen as at once an assessment of history and a registration of thought-in-progress which must itself become a part of history. It is as much relevant to the interests of the present student, scholar, or citizen who wishes insight into "modern" psychology in historical perspective as it is to those who in future may wish to understand the psychology of the present period.

A brief "Afterword" by the senior editor (pp. 928–950) identifies certain trends of the book as a whole—some of them so heartening as to encourage anticipations of a second century of increased intellectual dignity. We hope the psychologists (if there be such) of 2079, to whom we dedicate this book, will agree.

We wish to express deep gratitude to Lys Dunlap Koch (the senior editor's wife) for generously placing her long experience as a professional editor at the service of this project. We wish also to thank the senior editor's secretary, Rosalie Carlson, for her impeccable management of the project files and her subtly effective role in serving as a frequent communication link between the editors and contributors. Thomas Quinn, the editor in charge of this book at McGraw-Hill, could not have been more constant in his long-term dedication to the project, or more congenial to work with. Barbara Toniolo, who was the editing supervisor of the book, proved to be brilliant in her technical supervision and a delightful partner.

This is the point for the editors also to thank all contributors for their generous, insightful, and creative efforts. Sadly, it is also a point at which it is appropriate to acknowledge the voices who have been stilled during the interval since initiation of this project: not only James J. Gibson; also Dalbir Bindra, whose brilliant overview of "motivation" is included in the book; Walter Kaufmann, who generously crossed disciplinary lines in serving as one of the few humanist contributors; and Talcott Parsons, who was to have contributed on the relations between psychology and social science.

For the 1992 republication of this book, thanks are due to Julia Frank-McNeil, director of Acquisitions and Development for APA Books, who was the central and constantly nurturant figure in initiating and implementing the project. Thanks are due also to Valerie Montenegro of APA Books for unusually precise and responsive work as production editor of the new book.

We must sorrowfully record the death of an additional participant in the original (1985) publication: Robert R. Sears. Finally, Lys Dunlap Koch, who loaned so much of her editorial wisdom to the original publication, has also died. The senior editor dedicates his own contributions to the book to her memory.