Philosophical Principles of the History and Systems of Psychology

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Essential Distinctions

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To psychē (ψυχή)

Preface

As a kind of epigraph, toward contextualizing the central concern of this book, I would inscribe, as still pertinent for contemporary psychology, the following quote from William James' *The Principles of Psychology*:

> The fundamental conceptions of psychology are practically very clear to us, but theoretically they are very confused, and one easily makes the obscurest assumptions in this science without realizing, until challenged, what internal difficulties they involve. When these assumptions have once established themselves (as they have a way of doing in our very descriptions of phenomenal facts) it is almost impossible to get rid of them afterwards or to make any one see that they are not essential… (1918: 145)

This Preface is divided into three (3) parts. First, a general characterization of the structure, function, and content of this book. Second, a brief characterization of some of the motivation for writing this book. Third, a general overview of the book.

(1) This book may be of interest to anyone who wishes to "think through" the history of Western psychology. In fact, its original title was: *Philosophical Principles of the History and Systems of Psychology: Essential Distinctions for Thinking Through Psychology.* Specifically, this book is intended as supplementary for History and Systems of Psychology courses. It "fills a gap" in the literature, so to speak, in that though there

are many excellent "history of psychology" textbooks available today, a gap exists which may be traced to two aspects of the very nature of such books. First, the sheer amount of information contained, necessarily, in history of psychology textbooks makes it difficult for students to hold all the information in mind. Second, history of psychology textbooks are, of course, organized in relation to the vastness of the past, despite the historiographic choices faced by the historians who construct them.

Hence, it should be emphasized that this book is not a history textbook. If it were a history textbook, then it would be missing a good amount of information, for example compared to books produced by the likes of Sahakian (1975), Brennan (2003), Hergenhahn and Henley (2013), or Walsh et al. (2014). Keeping with the reference to the History and Systems of Psychology course, it would be more accurate to say this book is a systems textbook. Thus, on the one hand, this book is able to be manageably concise for students to hold in mind; in this way our focus on principles and essential distinctions may function as mnemonic devices for students. On the other hand, this book is organized in terms of principles and "systems," understood as constituted by clusters of principles. Moreover, after reviewing countless textbooks for, and teaching multiple sections of, the History and Systems of Psychology course, it seems clear that the structure and function of this book may be seen as "filling a gap" in the available literature.

Further, regarding the content of this book—forgive me for pointing it out—the authors of textbooks for the History and Systems of Psychology course have all been trained as psychologists. The value added of having someone with a PhD in philosophy construct a book for thinking through the history and systems of Western psychology will hopefully be evident after reading this book. Historians of psychology, philosophical psychologists, and psychologists with a desire for a panoramic view of their discipline have an understanding that Aristotle and Kant, for example, have been quite influential in the history of psychology; however, it is rare to find a rendering of the history of philosophy sufficient for students studying the history of psychology. The intention written into this book is that readers will invoke history while thinking through systems, whether it be in terms of a genealogy or history of contemporary psychology or in terms of an examination of the historicity of the principles and

commitments which have constituted the study of psychology throughout Western history.

A characterization of this book in terms of the technical vocabulary of historiography may be helpful for some readers. Thus, invoking Richard Rorty's (1984) "Four Genres" of historiography—discussed in Chap. 2—this book may be understood as engaged in "rational reconstruction," as opposed to "historical reconstruction," "canon-formation," or "doxography." Yet, the "rational reconstruction" here is directed at the philosophical principles out of which selections constitute the systems of psychology. As a result, such a "reconstruction" may be seen as a point of departure for a "revisionist canon-formation," in Rorty's terminology; however, a better—and a more readily understood—characterization of this book for the purpose of a Preface may come from saying: this book re-orients psychologists to the way the systematization of the history of psychology relates to philosophy, that is, to psychology's unavoidably "underlying" philosophy. Previous books in regard to the History and Systems of Psychology tend toward doxography and to deemphasize the constitutive role of philosophical principles, especially for contemporary psychology, as if psychology's relation to philosophy were merely an aspect of an intellectual historiography.

(2) As a result, this book contributes a statement of the principles from which the history of psychology may be systematically examined, and then works toward showing the differences across the major systems, which have manifested in the history of Western psychology, toward a starting point and orientation for further critical thinking. One of the problems plaguing contemporary psychologists in regard to theorizing psychology may be characterized as a "confusion of levels." On the one hand, many psychologists embrace the political principles of equality and cultural diversity. In terms of theory this is standardly characterized as a "commitment to pluralism." Of course, one of the signs of such pluralism is the agreement to civility despite disagreement. All this is good. However, on the other hand, this commitment has been erroneously embraced by many a graduate student—and, unfortunately for those they serve, some clinical psychologists—such that a kind of "anything goes" attitude may emerge. The actions brought-forth under the sway of such an attitude may or may not be labeled with the technical terms of "eclecticism" or

"anarchism." Yet, in either case, the erroneous embrace of pluralism entails coopting the ideal of pluralism for the sake of excusing oneself from thinking critically and self-reflectively in regard to the practice of psychology. The idea which is absolutely necessary for practitioners so they may emerge from such confusion is: *Incommensurability*. The idea is reflected in this book's subtitle: *Essential Distinctions*.

That is to say, we should recognize that there truly are essential distinctions between the various systems which throughout history have been used to characterize and identify the practice and study of psychology. Perhaps nowhere is such lax as irresponsible as it is in the field of psychotherapy. Some psychologists in the mere description of the services they provide—because they ignore or do not understand incommensurability—illustrate not a commitment to pluralism (again, forgive me for pointing it out) as much as an incompetence regarding the history and systems of psychology, which means an incompetence regarding the theory of their practice. It is as if they advertise: I will be a "blank screen" and provide you with "psychoanalysis," while I share personal information with you and transfer all sorts of "caring" feelings toward you through my office environment and personal comportment. We should have the courage to stand by our convictions (*and commitments*) and agree to disagree. Such a stance signifies a *real commitment to pluralism*.

This book should orient readers to the principles, the constellations of which constitute different systems of psychology, and to the essential distinctions between the different systems which emerge from their differently principled constitutions. That is to say, we can think through psychology by way of the innumerable persons, events, and facts which constitute its history, or we can think through psychology by way of the logic of its systems. This book takes the latter approach. In doing so, what a system rejects is often of more importance than what it affirms. In other words, when we find the points at which a system (personifying it for the sake of illustration) would say: "That is not, and cannot be, me," then we have made true gains toward understanding the activities and applications appropriate for such a system. In other words, true pluralism accepts that "psychology as the Behaviorist views it" is not "psychology as the Psychoanalyst views it," and neither is "psychology as the Existentialist views it."

(3) The Introduction of this book provides an understanding of the notions of "history" and "system" operable for the History and Systems of Psychology. Whereas the principles and distinctions enumerated and explicated in the Introduction are of a generally philosophical nature, the principles and distinctions of Chap. 2 are specifically oriented toward gaining an understanding of the science of psychology in regard to both its natural science (*Naturwissenschaften*) and its human science (*Geisteswissenschaften*) expressions. Further, the discussion of Aristotle on "univocity" provides a helpful bulwark against Postmodern readings of the kind of systematization of psychology for which this book advocates. On the one hand, we may say that the systematization is intended "pragmatically" or for "regulative," rather than reifying, purposes. On the other hand, just as Aristotle pointed to the requirement of univocal meaning as necessary for any scientific endeavor, so too against the Postmodern aversion to systematization we may modestly suggest that our approach is better on, at least, pedagogical grounds; otherwise, the *reductio ad absurdum* to which the Postmodern alternative amounts leads us into an educational situation in which we can no longer discern why plumbing and sandwich-making should not be included in the curriculum for psychologists.

The rest of the book—Chaps. 3, 4, 5, and 6—discuss the philosophical principles of the History and Systems of Psychology beginning with Socrates and Plato and moving into our contemporary situation. By examining the Pre-Modern to the Modern Periods, Chap. 3 discusses the principles of psychology during a time in its history when a sharp distinction was not made between the principles of psychology and the principles of ethics or morality. The period of Western history discussed in Chap. 4 amounts to a smorgasbord of methodological principles which have been carried forward and still influence the study of psychology today. Chapter 4 takes the Renaissance and the Modern Scientific Revolution as its point of departure. With emphasis on Descartes and Early Modern philosophers up to and including Kant, this chapter illustrates the search for a method on which to base, what was at the time called the "new philosophy." In a remarkably direct analogy, the "new psychology" based on the experimental method and modeled after the natural sciences is discussed in Chap. 5.

Beyond a discussion of the influence of "post-Kantian" principles found in the theorizing of Hegel, Darwin, and Marx, for example, Chap. 5 discusses the influence of Wundt and Titchener and the manner in which the principles understood as methodological innovations provided the context within which contemporary psychology emerged. This chapter includes heuristics standard for History and Systems of Psychology, for example the essential distinctions between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* and the "Four Forces" of contemporary psychology. Moreover, special effort is made throughout this book to organize the discussion of principles around a tripartite distinction between "structure," "function," and "method." Thus, the principles constituting the incommensurability between each of the Four Forces is also presented in terms of this tripartite distinction.

Finally, this book concludes with a discussion of essential distinctions between "Turns," often understood as "Cultural Turns" in the history of Western psychology. This includes the "Linguistic Turn," "Postmodernism," the "Cognitive Turn," aka the "Cognitive Revolution," and the "Historical Turn," aka the "Historic Turn" (for symmetry with "Linguistic"). On the one hand, this chapter functions as the conclusion of the book by providing an illustration—whether understood in terms of progress or not—of the contemporary state of the previously operable principles. On the other hand, it seeks to provide a discussion toward the principles constituting the current state of Western psychology from a systems perspective. In this way, just as one may find persons today who understand and practice psychology from the point of view of any of the Four Forces, so too each of the different "Turns" still stand as viable ways to contextualize contemporary psychology. Therefore, all of these essential distinctions have the potential to be used by the reader toward systematically thinking through the history of Western psychology.

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