

Sixth Edition

A Brief History of Psychology

Michael Wertheimer and Antonio E. Puente



A Brief History of Psychology

This brief, inexpensive text offers great flexibility in teaching the history of psychology. Used as a stand-alone text or with readers, this engaging book is noted for its analysis of the scientific and philosophical emergence of the field as well as its coverage of contemporary psychology and emerging areas. Readers appreciate the book's balanced coverage of experimental, applied, and clinical psychology, as well as the clear and succinct presentation of the field's major events and schools of thought. The sixth edition features an expanded pedagogical program with bolded terms, a complete glossary, more illustrations, and web-based instructional materials including PowerPoints, a test bank, discussion questions, and more. Special emphasis has also been placed on the role of the American Psychological Association (APA) in the history of psychology.

Extensively updated throughout, the sixth edition features:

- A revised final chapter with a current analysis of the state of the field, including the growth of the APA as well as specialized organizations that promote the science and profession of psychology, and the push to influence policies that address global challenges, such as environmental sustainability, intergroup conflict, health disparities, and the population explosion.
- A discussion of the growth in the number and role of women and ethnic minorities in psychology, and the promotion of diversity across both demographic and intellectual perspectives.
- Recent developments in the growth of neuroscience, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, and the diversification and internationalization of psychology.
- Portraits of some major figures in the history of psychology, including psychology's first Nobel Prize winners.
- Recent and evolving changes in the practice of psychology, including more emphasis on "evidence-based practice," prescription privileges, and the emergence of the importance of psychological practice in health care.
- Recent changes in the APA, including new divisions and new elected officials and its emerging focus on advocacy.

Used independently or as a supplement with readers, this brief text is intended for undergraduate and graduate courses on the history of psychology. Due to its brevity and engaging style, the book can be used in introductory courses to

introduce students to the field. The enormous index and substantial glossary make this volume a useful desk reference for psychology and related disciplines.

Michael Wertheimer has taught and published in the history of psychology for 70 years, including the first five editions of this book. Born in Germany to famed Gestalt theorist Max Wertheimer, he studied at Swarthmore, Johns Hopkins, and Harvard, and is now Professor Emeritus at the University of Colorado, Boulder, USA.

Antonio E. Puente has taught and published in the history of psychology and neuropsychology for over 40 years. Born in Cuba, he studied at the University of Florida and the University of Georgia, USA. He worked with Roger W. Sperry, a winner of the Nobel Prize, and was the 125th president of the American Psychological Association.

A Brief History of Psychology

Sixth edition

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vii
<i>List of Tables</i>	viii
<i>List of Chronological Charts</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 Introduction	1
PART I	
Pre-experimental Psychology	15
2 Early Developments	17
3 The Lines of Development from Science	27
4 The Lines of Development from Philosophy	37
Part I Summary	53
PART II	
The Rise of Experimental Psychology	55
5 Wundt's Immediate Predecessors	57
6 Wilhelm Wundt	67
7 The Contemporary Scene in the Age of Wundt	77
8 William James and Psychology in the United States	91
Part II Summary	104

PART III	
Psychology in the 20th Century	107
9 The Age of Schools	109
10 Structuralism and Functionalism	116
11 Behaviorism	127
12 Gestalt Psychology	139
13 Psychoanalysis	151
14 The Immediate Postschools Era	159
15 The Last Half of the 20th Century	171
Part III Summary	184
PART IV	
Psychology's Promising Past and Enigmatic Future	185
16 An Evaluation	187
<i>Glossary</i>	194
<i>References</i>	214
<i>Author Index</i>	218
<i>Subject Index</i>	226

Figures

0.1	Karl F. Muenzinger (1885–1958)	xii
2.1	Plato (ca. 427–347 BCE) and Aristotle (384–323 BCE)	20
2.2	Muenzinger’s river analogy: the trends leading to experimental psychology	24
3.1	Charles Darwin (1809–1882)	28
3.2	Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–1894)	29
3.3	Gaussian (normal) distribution curve	35
4.1	René Descartes (1596–1650)	39
4.2	John Locke (1632–1704)	41
4.3	David Hume (1711–1776)	44
4.4	Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)	45
5.1	Ernst Heinrich Weber (1795–1878)	60
5.2	Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887)	63
6.1	Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920)	68
7.1	Carl Stumpf (1848–1936)	79
7.2	Hermann Ebbinghaus (1850–1909)	83
7.3	Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve	84
7.4	Francis Galton (1822–1911)	87
8.1	William James (1842–1910)	92
8.2	G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924)	96
10.1	Edward Bradford Titchener (1867–1927)	117
10.2	John Dewey (1859–1952)	120
10.3	Edward L. Thorndike (1874–1949)	123
11.1	John Broadus Watson (1878–1958)	130
11.2	Clark L. Hull (1884–1952)	134
11.3	Edward C. Tolman (1886–1959)	134
11.4	B. F. Skinner (1904–1990)	136
12.1	Max Wertheimer (1880–1943)	141
12.2	Kurt Koffka (1886–1941)	143
12.3	Wolfgang Köhler (1887–1967)	144
12.4	Kurt Lewin (1890–1947)	147
13.1	Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)	152
13.2	Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961)	156
13.3	Alfred Adler (1870–1937)	156

Tables

8.1	The divisions of the APA as of 2020	102
9.1	The schools of psychology and what they stood for	111
9.2	How the schools of psychology exemplified the eight trends	112

Chronological Charts

Chronological chart: to 1800	15
Chronological chart: 1800 to 1900	55
Chronological chart: beyond 1900	107



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Preface

Karl F. Muenzinger (1885–1958) believed that study of the history of psychology can help develop an overview of the discipline and integrate the perplexing, apparently unrelated variety of material encountered in diverse psychology courses. Muenzinger developed the idea of the emergence of the science of psychology late in the 19th century as the product of five major scientific and three significant philosophical trends (physiology, biology, atomism, quantification, and the founding of laboratories; and critical empiricism, associationism, and scientific materialism). That perspective serves as the foundation for this book. Wertheimer was privileged to interact with Muenzinger and many other talented scholars in the area of the history of psychology (including Puente’s undergraduate advisor, Donald Dewsbury), and the present book reflects their ideas, innovations, and contributions. The material in this book was class-tested at several institutions with undergraduate and graduate students of the history of psychology. Student reactions and suggestions have been used in revisions of the manuscript, including the present edition. Some parts of the book have been presented as colloquia at various colleges and universities, as well as at several meetings including American Psychological Association (APA) conventions.

Writing a history of something implies the identification of that something. Most histories of psychology, including the first five editions of this book, at least implicitly specify that “something” as the science of psychology, with science defined as the empirical, objective, observable study of an area and psychology defined as the domain concerned with behavior and mental life. But this definition has evolved significantly. Starting with the advent of the cognitive revolution in the 1960s, and certainly salient by the end of the 20th century, there has been increasing focus on the “mental” side of the science of psychology. The general public typically continues to identify psychology as a not very rigorous field concerned primarily with the clinical aspects of helping individuals overcome personal difficulties. Many students now majoring in psychology hope to understand and “help people.” Applications to graduate programs in clinical psychology programs outnumber those to graduate programs that concentrate on the more natural-science aspects of psychology.

As a consequence, some might argue that a history of psychology should now be written with much more attention to counseling and other “softer” aspects of psychology, rather than concentrating primarily on the “hard science” aspects



Figure 0.1 Karl F. Muenzinger (1885–1958).

Courtesy of the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of Colorado at Boulder.

of the domain. But almost all practitioners of applied or professional psychology firmly believe that their practice of psychology has deep roots in the rigorous empirical endeavors of science. Hence the emphasis on scientific findings remains foundational to psychology and its history, as well as to this book.

One aim of this book is versatility. Because the presentation is relatively brief and condensed, it can be used as a supplement to a full-length text for courses on the history of psychology. For instructors who prefer to teach from primary sources, this book can provide a context for other assigned readings. Further, the book offers a concise historical overview of the field for the general reader, and can function as a general introductory text to psychology as a whole. With its substantial index and extensive glossary (when an item in the glossary occurs in the text, it appears **boldface**), it can also serve as a convenient general desk reference on psychology.

A final chapter explores developments during the first two decades of the 21st century and their possible implications for the future of psychology in general as well as its various specialties. While historians prudently caution against trying to obtain a broad perspective on very recent events, so much has happened in recent years that it seemed irresponsible to ignore it all. Major recent events in psychology and their impact on the field are explored in various places (mostly in the last few chapters) in this sixth edition.

Extensively updated throughout, this edition has several new features. It:

- contains, as just mentioned, a final chapter with an updated analysis of the current state of the field, including the growth of specialized organizations that promote the science and profession of psychology, and the push for psychology to influence policies that address national and global challenges such as environmental sustainability, intergroup conflict, health disparities, immigration, violence, and the population explosion.
- discusses in several places the growth in the number and role of women in psychology and the promotion of diversity initiatives in psychology related to age, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.
- considers recent developments in the expansion of neuroscience, cognitive science, and the diversification of psychology.
- mentions individuals who have had a recent impact on the field, such as two of psychology's Nobel Prize winners, Roger W. Sperry (brain function and consciousness) and Daniel Kahnemann (decision making), Rudolf Arnheim (the psychology of art), Jane Goodall (animal behavior), and Florence Denmark (international psychology and the psychology of women).
- includes discussion of recent changes in the practice of psychology, including prescription privileges, the increased emphasis on "evidence-based practice," the enhanced application of psychological principles to industrial and organizational settings, and psychology's increasing focus on social justice.
- presents updates on recent and emerging changes in the APA, including its newer divisions, newly elected officials, and new strategic plan, and the growing emphasis on advocacy as a core aspect of the APA's mission.
- again has a lengthy glossary and enormous index, which may contribute to the book's value as a general desk reference on psychology and its history.
- is accompanied by revised web-based teaching materials. For each chapter, there are Microsoft PowerPoint slides with chapter outlines, a list of key terms, and discussion questions. Lecture notes, along with chapter outlines, key terms, and discussion questions, are available as Microsoft Word documents as well. Instructors can also access a test bank of true/false, multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions. And for students there are chapter outlines and lists of key words and phrases, suggested readings, and hotlinks to related websites.

This book benefited from much-appreciated suggestions made by unidentified reviewers, as well as by Edwin G. Boring of Harvard University, O. J. Harvey of the University of Colorado at Boulder, Barney Beins of Ithaca College, Harry Heft of Denison University, Dean Keith Simonton of the University of California, Davis, Ryan D. Tweney of Bowling Green State University, and Wade E. Pickren of Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada. Their corrections and recommendations, and our own further reflection, have generated hundreds of (usually relatively minor) changes throughout the manuscript. As was true of the earlier editions, few if any pages escaped at least a bit of revision. Many stylistic changes are also the result of suggestions made by Wertheimer's daughter K. W. Watkins (PhD in

English from Yale), who, as in previous editions, also prepared the final manuscript and helped with the glossary and the index.

The major change in this sixth edition is the addition of Antonio E. Puente, who specializes in the history of psychology and in clinical neuropsychology, as its co-author. Wertheimer is deeply grateful to him for his willingness to share his wisdom and perspectives in the preparation of this edition even while Puente was swamped by myriad issues challenging the American Psychological Association, of which he became president-elect, then president, and until recently past president.

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1 Introduction

Before setting out on this brief tour through the history of psychology, consider some general background. The first section of this chapter will raise a few questions about the nature of history itself and about the problems that one will inevitably encounter when taking on the role of historian. The next section presents some thoughts about why one should bother contemplating psychology's history in the first place. The final section explores the various ways the history of psychology has been organized, referring briefly to some of the better-known works in the field, and ends with a characterization of the approach taken in the present work.

Some Comments on History in General

The historian faces obstacles the scientist can avoid. Historical truth is more elusive than scientific truth, although the scientist has problems too. Paradoxically, historical "facts" can change, but an empirical statement of a relationship stays put in some sense: anybody can check it. Scientific knowledge is timeless; a scientific generalization can be tested any time, by anyone who cares to set up appropriate conditions for observation. But history is an all-or-nothing affair; something happened once, and that's that—you cannot bring past events back into the present to study them and their determinants and effects at leisure, turning them this way and that, as you can examine some scientific statement in the laboratory. To be sure, there might be relics of the past event that you can use to try to pin it down—letters, canceled checks, diaries, monuments, official documents, email messages, sales slips, or the United States Congressional Record—but none of these is the event itself, and none is of unquestionable **reliability** or **validity**. Most important, none really tells you how to interpret the event. You can't unequivocally determine the causes and effects of the event, can't manipulate the **independent variables** responsible for it or measure the **dependent variables** it affects. In fact, you can never be sure that the presumed event actually happened at all. Perhaps it's just the figment of someone's fancy, dutifully perpetuated by those who came later. Chances are, it's harder to break a fad in history than in science. Once an event has found its way into the historical record, especially for a prolonged period of time, that event sometimes becomes unthinkingly accepted, whether or not it actually happened.

2 Introduction

Quite aside from questions such as whether Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492 (or whether it was Amerigo Vespucci, or a foolhardy Norseman, or, for that matter, the indigenous Americans, who were unaware that their land had to be discovered), there is the question of the *importance* of a presumed event. It is primarily this aspect of history that changes. How important was William the Conqueror in determining the events of about a thousand years ago? Just how significant is the Boston Tea Party *really*? Should everybody know how many soldiers went with Cyrus on the third march of the fifth month of his Anabasis or how many accompanied Caesar from one part of Gaul to another? It might be intriguing to hear that Hannibal managed to prod a herd of elephants over the Alps, that Henry VIII had goodness knows how many wives, that Demosthenes stuttered, or how many Americans were lost in the wars of the 20th century; but, ultimately, so what? Rather than recording that a man once stood at a graveyard and intoned, “Four score and seven years ago,” and so forth, why not record that an ant, at the same time and place, happened to be walking over the letter M on poor Private Pat Smith’s headstone? That’s an event too. History just isn’t impartial; it is highly and inevitably selective.

History, then, deals with events about which one can’t be certain, the significance of which is debatable, and whose selection for attention is an idiosyncratic, subjective matter. No historian can be unbiased. Even if one had many lifetimes and infinite powers of observation and memory, it would still be an impossible chore to produce a complete, unbiased description of all of the events that occurred, say, between 4:01 a.m. and 4:03 a.m. on Thursday, May 30, 2019. What do you include? That the president of the United States sneezed? That this was the seven-year anniversary of the day Gabriel Lanai Ellis was born on the porch of a cabin at 8,500 feet, 6 miles west of Boulder, Colorado, and that his cousin Cassidy Joy Wertheimer, sleeping in Windsor, Colorado, scratched her left knee? That in Rocky Mountain National Park a 13-inch-diameter, ragged piece of granite, loosened by the freezing and thawing of thousands of years, fell with a clatter from near the top of the east face of Longs Peak down onto Mills Glacier and then rolled all the way onto frozen Chasm Lake? And even if all of these items were to be included in your list of events, how much detail would you devote to each? In what order should you include them? How much would you emphasize each one? How far back before 4:01 and how far beyond 4:03 would you go to “make the event meaningful,” to “set it in its context,” to “show its significance”?

No, history is not independent of the historian. It does not stay put. Which events to emphasize, which ones to include or exclude, how to interpret what you select—all of this depends on the historian’s bias.

Much of what the student of history has to wade through is the doings that somebody thought important, of people whom somebody thought important. Perhaps the easiest (and clearly the most usual) solution is to write about people considered significant by their contemporaries and events that at the time caused raised eyebrows, an increased heart rate, or untimely deaths. Kings, dictators, presidents, prime ministers, religious leaders and their wars, battles, murders, intrigues, and other shenanigans form the bulk of most history books. Some

daring souls have also tried to compile histories of ideas, of cultural movements, of humans as thinking, creative, evolving creatures rather than purely political or economic ones—a quite different orientation. Yet the basic problem remains the same: how do you select, what do you relate to what, how do you interpret what? Somebody else might see the same things very differently or might choose to look at very different things.

One recurrent issue, insistently and insightfully brought by Edwin G. Boring (1950a) to the attention of anyone interested in history, is that of the **Zeitgeist** versus the **great individual** view of events. Just what is the role of the “spirit of the time” (the *Zeitgeist*) or of the place (the *Ortgeist*) in determining what happens, as against the role of some unusual person who is strong enough to withstand the *Zeitgeist* or the *Ortgeist* and change the course of events? Would there have been no Holocaust if there hadn’t been an Adolf Hitler? Was Sigmund Freud just a passive agent of the climate of ideas in Vienna at about the turn of the 20th century? Would somebody else have come up with an emphasis on **unconscious motivation**, or was he, his unique existence, responsible—in spite of the *Zeitgeist*—for the creation of the psychoanalytic view? It is usually too simple to cast such questions into an either–or form, but the relative contribution of the great individual and of the *Zeitgeist* still remains largely a matter of the intentional or unintentional raw preference of the historian. Even though there might be occasional circumstantial evidence, such as simultaneous independent yet similar discoveries or formulations, which suggest a *Zeitgeist* influence, there are no convincing objective guidelines. For that matter, until recently, the “great individual” has been synonymous with a “great man” since few women were recognized as part of psychology or of its leadership. Indeed this approach was also largely limited to white men. Again, not until recently, actually very recently, have individuals outside of this limited demographic group been visibly involved in the history of psychology.

And then there is the question of the organization of what the historian chooses to pull out of the stream of events. **Chronology** seems the obvious outline. But it is not really as straightforward as that. If historians try to make some sense out of what is being talked about rather than record in an endless, dull list that this happened, then that happened, and then the other occurred, they must permit themselves to jump back and forth to some extent. While busy expounding the chain they have constructed for events q, r, s, and t, they must ignore the fact that u, v, w, and x happened to be going on at the same time—according to their view, these belong in a different chain. So they run back again to u, v, w, and x after they have finished with q, r, s, and t. The extreme of a pure chronology, then, is just about impossible, even if one breaks the account down into arbitrary units such as the period 1740–1749, then 1750–1759, and so on.

The other extreme is completely separate chains, as in one book about the history of England and another about the history of France or one on philosophy and one on psychology. But this approach also has inherent problems. Most historians will want to refer to other concurrent chains occasionally, especially when they happen to have links in common—as in the invasions of France by England or vice versa. Again, it seems a matter of sheer preference whether the historian

4 Introduction

chooses to be closer to the chronology pole or the history-of-some-particular-movement (or country, or discipline, or whatever) pole.

One distinction that historians of science have pointed to is the difference between **internal** and **external history**. Most non-historians who have written histories of their fields (such as physics, chemistry, biology—or, for that matter, psychology) trace the sequence of major ideas, discoveries, theories, or other notable events in their fields without paying much attention to what else was going on at the time. In this sense, they produce internal histories: histories that focus primarily (or even exclusively) on events in the discipline itself. People with substantial training in history are more likely to place the evolution of a discipline into a much broader sociocultural, political, and economic context. They tend to write more external histories: what contemporaneous events in other fields, in international relations, in the intellectual and institutional and cultural milieu, explain why things happened as they did in a particular time and place? Clearly, some balance of internal and external is most illuminating, so long as the account doesn't end up being exhaustingly exhaustive. To help indicate the external context, this book includes a few chronological charts that are intended to place various people and events in the history of psychology in temporal relation with various people and events in world history.

A related distinction emphasized by historians contrasts **presentism** (looking at past events from today's perspective) with **historicism** (placing past events into their actual social and intellectual context rather than viewing them purely from the point of view of today's implicit assumptions). While it is humanly impossible to avoid any trace of presentism, the responsible writing of history requires recognition of the cultural, social, and intellectual settings within which the events recounted occurred.

These points are raised here partly because the present writers are not professionally trained historians. But if history is at bottom a matter of idiosyncratic bias concerning what to include, how to include it, and how to interpret it, then even amateurs' efforts might be permissible. To the extent that they differ from others' efforts, they might help to loosen a possibly too tenacious tradition of what the best way to systematize the field might be or of what "the" history of the field is. There is no such thing as "the" history of anything.

Anyone aspiring to write a history of any field comes with implicit assumptions that are inevitably biased by education, prejudices, and background. So to permit the reader to gauge the present authors' perspectives, here is some information about where the authors are coming from. It has inevitably colored every aspect of this book.

With inspiring exposure to humanities and social sciences as an undergraduate student at Swarthmore College, the senior author majored successively in French literature, then linguistics, then philosophy, and finally psychology. His father, Gestalt psychologist Max Wertheimer, had died before the author got to college. But a colleague of Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, a psychology professor at Swarthmore, sent the author off to graduate school at The Johns Hopkins University, hoping that the hard-nosed science orientation there would counteract what he considered the author's excessive exposure to tender-minded

humanities at Swarthmore. At Swarthmore (and earlier at home) he had learned that **Gestalt theory** had the right approach to psychology and that **behaviorism** was wrong. But Hopkins, still a hotbed of behaviorism back in the late 1940s, taught that Gestalt was wrong, and that behaviorism was the answer. That was hard to swallow, so after a Hopkins MA he switched to Harvard University for his doctorate. But that change didn't help: the spirit of Titchenerian **structuralism**, taught as wrong at both Swarthmore and Hopkins, still dominated the implicit assumptions at Harvard. Perhaps these bewildering experiences helped the author to start thinking for himself a bit more rather than just to accept the dogmas that illustrious, respected professors espoused.

He did complete a dissertation—on **psychophysics**—at Harvard, but then took an internship in **clinical psychology** at Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts for a year to try to find out what that perspective was all about. Back then, some seven decades ago, it was still possible to get a clinical internship, indeed one sponsored by the U.S. Public Health Service, without having to complete all sorts of seminars, course work, and practica beforehand.

But Worcester produced another disconcerting experience that jaundiced his perspective on clinical psychology. He learned that the scientific empirical approach that all three then-competing theoretical orientations (Gestalt, behaviorism, and structuralism) took for granted, both explicitly and implicitly, was not equally shared by *all* clinical psychologists. His mentor at Worcester, kept nameless here, was convinced that “eye” content responses on the **Rorschach test**—seeing eyes in those inkblots—are an unmistakable pathognomonic sign of paranoid ideation, especially if the response is something intense like “those threatening eyes are staring out at me from the gloom.” Obeying the strong empirical orientation imprinted on him by all three schools, Gestalt, behaviorism, and structuralism, the author ransacked the copious department files of Rorschach protocols and diagnoses at Worcester State Hospital, hundreds of them, and did a simple double classification: yes or no on eye content responses on the Rorschach, and yes or no on paranoia showing up in the diagnosis or case history. Even though the Rorschach protocols had often played a role in the diagnosis, there turned out to be literally *no* relation between the two variables.

An early technical paper was actually published on this non-finding. Soon after he told his supervisor about this finding (or lack of it), the author attended a demonstration the supervisor was giving to medical and psychology interns on how to interpret Rorschach protocols. “Ah,” he said, “here’s a strong eye content response. This is a sure sign...” and he looked at the senior author and added, “—your opinion, Mike, to the contrary notwithstanding—that the patient shows extreme suspiciousness, strong signs of paranoia.” The author’s *opinion* to the contrary? It wasn’t an opinion; it was a description of fact, based on hard data. Sheer opinions and repeatable empirical findings should by no means be considered equally compelling. This unfortunate experience is probably still tainting the senior author’s somewhat ambivalent perspective on clinical psychology.

The senior author’s entire career since his 1952 PhD has been spent in academia, and except for a few inevitable bumps and problems along the way he has enjoyed almost every day of it. Though of course it hasn’t made him fabulously

wealthy financially, to be paid to share his enthusiasm with eager young minds, to explore almost any question wherever it might lead, via lab or correlational investigations or thinking about it or by bouncing ideas off of bright, young, unprejudiced souls—it has been a most exhilarating career. It was especially gratifying to help sometimes self-doubting students in an undergraduate psychology honors program that he directed for four decades to perform modest but original studies that convinced them that they *were* capable of generating good scholarly products and maybe were reasonably bright after all. And he has been graced by awards for teaching, for advising, for contributions to the history of psychology, and for insisting on nonsexist language in scholarly writing.

He directed doctoral programs in **experimental psychology** and in **socio-cultural psychology**. And since early in his career he has been involved in some way or another with organized psychology, including the **Psychonomic Society**, **Psi Chi**, the **Association for Psychological Science (APS)**, and the **American Psychological Association (APA)**. He had some kind of official position in the APA continuously for more than half a century, having been a fellow of the division of experimental psychology and fellow, president, and a representative to the APA Council of Representatives for the divisions of general psychology, the teaching of psychology, the history of psychology, and theoretical and philosophical psychology. And he has been a member or chair of many different APA boards and committees over the years, culminating in three years (2007–2009) on the APA board of directors.

The junior author is similarly not a historian by training though his interest in history preceded his formal education in psychology. He was introduced to psychology at a community college before transferring to the University of Florida. There he began working with Donald Dewsbury, pursuing comparative psychology research but being introduced at the nearby medical school to the emerging specialty of neuroscience. He then became Dewsbury's colleague, collaborating on several history of psychology projects with him. After taking a year working at a psychiatric hospital, he enrolled in a new biopsychology program at the University of Georgia. He earned his master's degree in clinical psychophysiology there, using the paradigm of Evgeny Sokolov to study the cardiovascular stress response. He pursued his doctorate in the biopsychology program (now known as the Behavior and Brain program) studying the EEG patterns of different meditative states, including mindfulness. The brain, it seemed to him, is much more interesting than the peripheral nervous system. After completing his dissertation, he took a position teaching functional neuroanatomy and establishing the neuroanatomy laboratory at St. George's University School of Medicine in Grenada, West Indies. Due to the unexpected invasion of the island by Cuban Communists, he retreated back to the United States and considered himself fortunate to be able to accept a position as clinical psychologist at Northeast Florida State Hospital, a University of Florida teaching hospital. There he immersed himself entirely in a neuropsychological perspective on severe and persistent mental illness. Spending three years in this capacity he not only did extensive neuropsychological patient evaluations but began to change his research focus from EEG to neuropsychological testing. In the evenings he taught a variety of courses at the University

of North Florida. Realizing that he preferred the more academic perspective of discovery and sharing findings with students to providing primarily clinical services, he sought and found an academic job, a visiting position at the new department of psychology at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. With the growth of the department to include doctorate programs in psychology, he made clinical neuropsychology central to his teaching, research and clinical service. He taught general psychology, history of psychology, brain and behavior, and **clinical neuropsychology**, and founded a laboratory that included undergraduates and graduate students as well as postdoctoral fellows. Many of the latter have been from other countries, ranging from Russia and Spain to South Africa and Mexico. The focus of the laboratory has been heavily, though not exclusively, on the interface between culture and neuropsychology. The lab, which is now called the Roger W. Sperry Neuropsychology Laboratory, has been archiving Sperry's work since his death in 1994. Sperry, one of psychology's Nobel Prize winners, opened his laboratory to the junior author during the last decade of his life. An informal mentorship emerged, resulting in the junior author becoming Sperry's archivist and biographer.

The junior author has an active practice in clinical neuropsychology. His practice started with several other psychologists, then merged with a large multidisciplinary medical practice. He eventually developed a solo private practice, in which he focuses on both clinical and forensic neuropsychological assessments, including some limited psychotherapeutic interventions with neurologically comprised individuals.

He is also highly involved in professional organizations, and in 2000 he founded a bilingual mental health clinic for indigents in his community, which he continues to direct. He has been president of the North Carolina Psychological Association, the North Carolina Psychological Foundation, the Hispanic Neuropsychological Society, the Society for Clinical Neuropsychology, the National Academy of Neuropsychology—and the American Psychological Association.

Some Comments on the History of Psychology

According to the American Psychological Association, the history of psychology is as fundamental to the study of psychology as are introductory courses, statistics, and experimental design. Indeed, these four courses have been considered central to the undergraduate curriculum for over half a century, as evidenced by their inclusion by all of the APA's Undergraduate Curriculum Meetings (the junior author participated in the last two of these meetings). The course is frequently taught in this spirit, especially at the undergraduate level. Reflecting its importance, there are more books about it in print now than ever before, and more have been published in the last few decades than in all the preceding time. Almost every introductory psychology text addresses the topic. There is a *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* and a Cummings Center for the History of Psychology at the University of Akron, Ohio (formerly known as the Archives of the History of American Psychology; the renaming of the Archives reflects a recent and significant gift in 2014 from former APA president Nicholas Cummings and his wife

Dorothy Cummings), and the American Psychological Association has a division on the history of psychology (which publishes the journal *History of Psychology*). All of these are still thriving.

This continuing interest must have a reason. Psychologists are expected to know something about the history of their discipline and, as previously mentioned, a course in the history of psychology is part of the requirement structure for the undergraduate psychology major at many colleges and universities. Graduate programs preparing students who wish to qualify for state or provincial licensure or board certification for the **practice of psychology** have long been required to offer training in the history of psychology. Particularly when one considers that all too many people view history as a dull subject, a matter of memorizing undifferentiated concatenations of names and dates, why encourage—or force—exposure to such dry and deadly dull material, possibly running the risk of snuffing the student's intrinsic interest in the subject matter of psychology? Why is it widely held to be a “good thing” for the student of psychology to have some acquaintance with the history of the discipline?

First, there is Cicero's rationalization, engraved in stone over the west portico of the University of Colorado's Norlin Library, that those who know only their own generation always remain children. Humanity and human thought have evolved over the eons, and the incredible spurt of change in the last few centuries has doubtless been greatly helped, perhaps even made possible, by the practice of preserving one person's idea in writing so that another, or many others, could ponder it even when the original author of the idea is not around. To grow up, we need to extend our horizons beyond our own limited sensory experiences. This does not imply that to achieve this goal, one must lose a child's enthusiasm. The opposite is true: it is wise for a mature person to reflect both knowledge of the past and enthusiasm for the present and the future.

Yet one could counter that there might be harm in smelling the gray mustiness of bygone times. Perhaps this is the route to becoming a bubble, an empty Babbitt, to losing childhood's saturated enthusiasm, to acquiring an unproductive, level-headed, resigned, perspective-filled maturity and the conviction that there is nothing new or worthwhile under the sun.

Another reason sometimes given for studying the history of psychology is that it is traditional to do so. Even Aristotle's *De Anima* has a section on past philosophers' musings about the soul. One of America's pioneer psychologists, Edward Titchener, inspired students and colleagues alike about the importance of psychology's history, and almost all teachers of psychology had to take a course in the history of psychology at one time or another. So, the argument seems to go, let us twist the Golden Rule a bit and insist that we should do unto others as others have done unto us. Maybe some depth psychologists would point to the security-providing benefits of ritual, but just because something has been done in a particular way for a long time doesn't mean it is still reasonable to continue doing it. The teachings of today should fit the needs of today; maybe a saber-toothed curriculum should be permitted to become extinct with the saber-toothed tiger.

Third, the study of history can provide perspective and humility. It is good to know that there are points of view different from that to which we are committed,

and that others in the past have entertained notions both similar and dissimilar to ours. Wisdom is not limited to present writers nor to our perspectives. Great minds of the past have had great ideas that are worth pondering today and that can help us refocus on the broad, fundamental questions to which we should be devoting our efforts. Also, chances are that ideas placed in their context will be more forceful, fecund, and consequential than ideas developed in a vacuum. Other than pointing to the possible motivating power of blind fanaticism, it is hard to argue against the desirability of perspective and humility.

Fourth, a study of history can occasionally illuminate past errors. Those who do not know their history may be doomed to repeat its mistakes. History can be profoundly liberating and might even help us become less subject to the influence of the particular sociocultural context within which we live and work. Awareness of some of the traps our ancestors have fallen into might make us tread more cautiously and make it less likely that we will be caught by the same ones.

Fifth, a rather compelling rationale for the study of the history of psychology has to do with the vastness and complexity of the field of psychology today. The typical student of psychology, graduate or undergraduate, is bewildered by the variety of materials encountered in lectures, seminars, books and journals, all of them presumably somehow relevant to that apparently senselessly conglomerate area known as *psychology*. The American Psychological Association, while attempting to unify the field, has over 50 divisions, ranging from **psychoanalysis** to aesthetics, comparative psychology, and clinical neuropsychology. How are the various ideas, subfields, and specialties related? How do they tie in with other psychological perspectives and other disciplines? A historical examination of the field might help integrate, might show how psychology developed out of a rather limited number of fundamental philosophical and scientific concerns, and might help one to see that the seemingly infinite diversity of the disparate things that go under the name of psychology might not be quite as much of an accidental hodgepodge of unrelated facts and theories as it first appears.

Today's psychology is the child of yesterday's psychology; today's psychology makes more sense if one understands how it got to be the way it is. The historical context determines to some extent the problems that are studied and how they are studied—and even the language to be used in talking about the problems. Acquaintance with what happened before can help one realize that current concerns may well be consequences of decisions made by people long ago rather than necessarily inherent in the subject matter itself.

Study of the history of psychology, then, can provide perspective, can point out lines of development, can indicate the origin of ideas, can help one avoid mistakes others have made before, can show how various things fit together, and might help free us from blind, irrational adherence to today's unspoken, implicit assumptions and biases. But ultimately, history, like art, needs no defense. The best reason for bothering with it might well be sheer curiosity or a desire of the finite bit of flesh to find some meaning in its labors, indeed, in its existence, to transcend its here and now, to discover its place in the vast scheme of things. Just what pleasure and consolation the historian and the consumer of history get out of the enterprise might be lost in some Freudian impulse, Adlerian complex, Jungian **archetype**,

or Rogerian feeling. Is it a feeling of power, of identification, of being less the victim of one's past if the past is not so shadowy and awesome, like an amorphous apparition, all-powerful in a nightmare? Perhaps knowledge of the past, having a structure for what has gone before, will free us from nameless childish fears and "fake news," and enable us to stride forth on our own, in our own direction. Some psychoanalysts say that an understanding of our early experience will help us to discover ourselves and free us for productive endeavor. Maybe an understanding of the early experience of one's discipline—especially if that discipline is concerned with the study of humanity and human mental life—will have a similar effect.

One need not, though, rummage around in a speculative unconscious to defend the study of the history of psychology. Everybody enjoys a good story. And the history of psychology has fascinating people, events, and ideas in it, enough for dozens of gripping movies, television shows, or historical novels, as well as innumerable tweets, Facebook comments, Pinterest boards, and Instagram posts. The history of psychology can be and is very interesting in itself. It's fun. The study of history, in the last analysis, needs no defense.

Approaches to the History of Psychology¹

So there are good reasons for looking at the history of psychology. But how should one organize and present it? Several different strategies have been used. Most popular is perhaps the internal **chronological** account, exemplified by Boring (1950b), Murray (1988), Murphy and Kovach (1972), and Schultz and Schultz (2016). To be sure, these are really quasi-chronologies, following one trend for a while and then backtracking to take up a different trend, yet time is the prime basis for the organization of these books (although Murphy and Kovach did append a set of chapters on recent research developments). Goodwin combined a book of readings (2010) with a chronological account (2015) that focuses on the last century and a half, and Benjamin wrote a brief history of psychology that examines both the science and the practice of psychology (2018) and edited companion volumes of readings (2008) and of letters by prominent psychologists (2009). Shiraev (2014) wrote a lengthy chronological account from a more global perspective.

Second is a strategy that emphasizes the great **schools of psychology** that flourished during the first half of the 20th century. Woodworth (1931), Heidbreder (1933) as well as Woodworth and Sheehan (1964) represent this strategy, and it is also noticeable in the books by Wolman (1968), Hillner (1984), Marx and Cronan-Hillix (1987), Brennan (2009), and Sternberg and Pickren (2019). In a sense, it is also the organizing principle behind several surveys of theories, in particular subareas of psychology such as Bower and Hilgard's (1981) *Theories of Learning* or Hall, Lindzey, and Campbell's (1997) *Theories of Personality*.

A third strategy has been to ask prominent older psychologists to write personal or professional autobiographies; this was the basis for the volumes titled *A History of Psychology in Autobiography*, originally edited by Carl Murchison and later by Lindzey (1930–2007), for Krawiec's (1974) *The Psychologists*, and for a volume edited by Mos (2009). Dewsbury (1985) and Drickamer and Dewsbury (2009)

published a series of autobiographical chapters by pioneering individuals who studied animal behavior. A similar organization, although less concerned with the personal and centered more on the professional contributions of distinguished psychologists, is used in the classic volumes of Koch's (1959–1963) *Psychology: A Study of a Science*.

Related to this strategy is the “great individual” approach, which summarizes the contributions of major figures in the history of psychology. George A. Miller (1991) wrote a delightful introductory textbook in psychology that made extensive use of this approach, and it is the focus of works by Sargent and Stafford (1984), Watson and Evans (1991), Hothersall (2004), and Benjamin (2018). Fancher (2016) used this approach perhaps most successfully of all. There even have been partly fictional accounts of significant pioneers of psychology, such as in a series of volumes edited by Kimble and Wertheimer (1991–2011).

Still a fifth strategy concentrates on the external history of the field, showing in particular how the history of psychology fits with other developments in the history of ideas. The volume by MacLeod (1975) is an admirable, if incomplete, attempt of this kind; Lowry, Shapiro, and Walsh (2017), Robinson (1995), Kardas (2013), Brennan and Houde (2018), and Leahey (2018) made similar attempts. King, Viney, and Woody (2016) combined this strategy with emphasis on psychological writings before the modern era and with substantial material on **psychopathology**, **social psychology**, motivation, and **personality**. And Pickren and Rutherford (2010) do an admirable job of placing events in the history of psychology in their social, intellectual, and political contexts. An earlier contribution of this kind is Guthrie's book (1997) *Even the Rat Was White*, which describes the implicit bias that has affected how the history of psychology is portrayed.

Then there are the implicit histories, the books of readings in the history of psychology, anthologies that compile excerpts from great writers of long ago and not so long ago. Dennis published a compendium in 1948, and more recently Shipley (1961), Herrnstein and Boring (1965), Diamond (1974), Watson (1979), Sahakian (1981), Munger (2003), Benjamin (2008), and Goodwin (2010) have produced additional ones. Each of the more than 100 selections in Herrnstein and Boring's work is preceded by a brief introduction that places it in its historical context. Diamond, Goodwin, and Watson did the same. Robinson (1977–1978) reprinted significant works in the history of psychology in a massive multivolume edition that contains substantial commentaries.

Another strategy focuses on the history of organizations. Evans, Sexton, and Cadwallader (1992), for example, edited a history of the American Psychological Association, and Dewsbury (1996–2000) edited books consisting of separate chapters on the various divisions of that association. Williams (2008) provided a history of the Association of Black Psychologists by prominent members of that association. Pate and Wertheimer (1993) edited a volume that details the histories of regional psychological associations in the United States, and Davis and Wertheimer (2000) put together an oral history of Psi Chi, the national honor society in psychology. Baker and Pickren (2007) published a volume on psychology in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and Pickren and Schneider (2005) edited one on psychology and the National Institute of Mental Health

(NIMH); Mangelsdorff (2006) edited a book on psychology in the service of national security. To commemorate the 125th anniversary of the APA (during which time the junior author was president), Pickren and Rutherford (2018) edited a comprehensive treatise on the evolution of the association from 26 members to 120,000 members of the present day.

Still another strategy begins with decisions about which research fields are significant on the contemporary scene and then proceeds to an examination of the histories of these. Chaplin and Krawiec (1979) did this for each of several major subfields of psychology, such as **sensation**, perception, learning, quantitative psychology, and personality, whereas Postman (1968) chose somewhat narrower issues, such as cortical localization of function, **repression**, hypnosis, the nature and measurement of intelligence, or **nativism** and **empiricism** in perception, and asked experts in these problems to write histories of them. Hearst (1979) edited a similar work, as did Kimble and Schlesinger (2014) and Sarris and Parducci (1983). Norcross, VandenBos, and Freedheim (2011) edited a volume on the history of **psychotherapy**. Frank Dumont (2010) wrote a thorough, scholarly history of personality psychology. Koch (2012) identified 40 major experiments that he argued shaped the history of psychology. Popplestone and McPherson (1999) contributed an illustrated history of psychology, which provides a fine compilation of photographs of psychology's history.

Then there are reference books focused on the history of psychology, such as Watson (1974, 1976) and Viney, Wertheimer, and Wertheimer (1979), in which the history is largely implicit. Some have provided histories of special fields or groups in psychology, such as Stevens and Gardner (1982) and O'Connell and Russo (1983–2001) on women psychologists, Eckardt, Bringmann, and Sprung (1985) on developmental psychology, Puente, Matthews, and Brewer (1992) on the history of teaching in psychology, Guthrie (1997) on African-American psychologists, Mandler (2007) on experimental psychology, Koopes (2014) on industrial psychology, and Baker and Benjamin (2016) on **professional psychology**. Hilgard (1978) based a fine book on presidential addresses to the American Psychological Association. There are also accounts of emerging specialties, such as the one on clinical neuropsychology by Benton (2000).

A few biographies of major figures in the history of psychology have been published as well, such as those by Wolf (1973) on Binet, Jones (1993) on Freud, Bjork on James (1997b) and on Skinner (1997a), McReynolds (1997) on Witmer, and King and Wertheimer (2007) on Wertheimer.

The present book tries to combine the first two strategies with the fourth and concentrates more on experimental psychology than on other fields. The organization is primarily chronological, but with emphasis on the great individuals and ideas in psychology's history and on the schools of psychology. Part I looks at the intellectual background that culminated in the establishment of experimental psychology as an independent discipline, glancing briefly at Greek and **Renaissance** thought and then developing in greater detail the eight major trends that can be seen as the backbone of the new discipline. Part II centers on Wilhelm Wundt, who has been widely viewed as the major exemplar of the new psychology, and explores the intellectual climate of his day; it ends with a glance at

psychology in the United States both before and after the world center of psychology moved from east to west across the Atlantic Ocean. Part III presents the major schools of psychology² that flourished in the first half of the 20th century, glances at developments in the immediate postschools era, and attempts an overview of the psychological scene of the last four or five decades. Part IV evaluates the fate of psychology early in the 21st century.

Summary

There is no such thing as a definitive or unchanging history of anything. What is fished out of the stream of events as worth paying attention to, and how what is selected is to be interpreted, depends ultimately on the idiosyncratic, subjective biases of the historian. Nevertheless, a historical overview of a discipline can provide background, integration, and perspective and can be absorbing in its own right.

Interest in the history of psychology, while it might have waned a bit, appeared to increase during the second half of the 20th century and is continuing into the 21st century. Most histories have been written with a chronological internal orientation, but there have also been books based on significant schools, important individuals, significant concurrent social and political events, influential works, or major research areas. The present work combines attention to the contributions of important people with discussions of major schools in a condensed chronological account of the evolution of psychology as an empirical discipline.

Notes

- 1 Many books are referred to in this section. Many of them provide a quite different, and in most cases a more complete, account of the details of the history of psychology than the present text. See the list of references at the end of this book, which also includes significant contributions to the history of psychology that are not mentioned in this text: Buxton (1985), Greenwood (2015), Hunt (2007), Koch and Leary (1985), Lundin (1996), Murphy (1968), O'Boyle (2011), Roback (1969), Sahakian (1975), Thorne and Henley (2005), Wolman (1981), and Walsh, Teo, and Baydala (2014).
- 2 Structuralism tried to identify the contents of the mind and break that down into its elements; **functionalism** examined the functions that mental processes achieve for the organism; behaviorism attempted to make psychology an objective science by concentrating only on observable behavior and eliminating everything "mental" from psychology; Gestalt theory emphasized that natural wholes are fundamentally different from a mere sum of their constituent parts and that properties of wholes determine the nature of their parts; and psychoanalysis endeavored to identify the hidden unconscious processes that affect conscious events and that generate psychopathology.