

Психологические науки

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THE CONCEPT OF PSYCHOLOGY: A COMMENT ON CORRESPONDENCE CONFERENCE [КОНЦЕПЦИЯ ПСИХОЛОГИИ: КОММЕНТАРИЙ НА ЗАОЧНУЮ КОНФЕРЕНЦИЮ]

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Резюме. Автор представляет обзор ряда основных концепций психологии и определения ее предмета. История психологии имеет большой интерес и ценность, т.к. благодаря ее исследованиям можно понять процесс становления психологии на протяжении многих веков. История психологии – это область споров, обсуждений и дебатов, которую историки должны развивать и организовывать.

Ключевые слова: интеллектуальная история, история психологии, предмет психологии, определение, психология.

There are different conceptions of psychology, but no one concept.

'Psychology' is a family name for a vast range of different activities, from theological debates about the immortality of the soul, to running white rats in mazes in order to study learning, to counselling parents about how a child is developing. Of course, there have been attempts to define psychology as the science of mind, or of behaviour, or of mind and behaviour, or of the psyche, or of the soul, or of consciousness, or of brain functions. These definitions are of historical interest, but so is the fact that there are different conceptions in different times and different cultures. Moreover, the search to define meaning is even more complicated because the word 'psychology' in everyday English denotes the states, or way of being that humans (or animals) have, the subject matter studied as psychology. Thus, for example, we talk about a person's psychology, or about psychological problems, as well as about the knowledge or

practice of occupations called psychology. Psychology is certain forms of existence themselves as well as the study of those forms.

People with the training and activity to qualify as professional (academic or applied) psychologists claim authority to make statements about psychology. Yet, in modern times, ordinary people use the language of psychology to describe themselves, relations with others and their conditions of life (health, well-being and so forth). So, in some social settings psychology is a science, or a profession, while in other settings it is part of the adaptive and expressive repertoire of daily life. This is, I think, a live issue in the current debate about the apparent globalization of psychology. According to one viewpoint, there are indigenous psychologies, growing out of local cultural traditions, from which the world profession can learn, especially in fostering human well-being. According to the opposite viewpoint, the scientific psychology and professional practices of the English-speaking world achieve knowledge and set standards that the rest of the world should follow. There are different concepts of psychology at work in these alternatives.

All these issues are reflected in different conceptualizations of the history of psychology. It is one kind of history to study the background to what now forms the mainstream of professional and scientific psychology. It is another kind of history to study what may be totally different ways of thought (Tibetan psychology, perhaps, or an Orthodox science of the soul) which are said, by some people, to be resources for re-thinking and re-shaping mainstream scientific psychology. It is my view that the history of psychology should include *debate* about such questions. If it does, however, historical work cannot presuppose one concept of psychology, whatever that concept may be. There is no reason to assume a relationship between one word, '*psychologia*', whenever it first came into use, and any particular later concept of psychology. What a word signifies is a subject for historical research.

It may be, though it cannot be confirmed, that the first use of the word '*psychologia*' came in a text, now lost, by Marko Marulic, a Dalmatian humanist who wrote in Latin and Croatian in the early sixteenth century. Throughout the sixteenth century and later, there were a range of new words in Latin based on the Greek roots *psyche* and *pneuma*. '*Psychologia*' was one of the words sometimes used, but it had no settled meaning and did not receive any special attention (Vidal 2011, pp. 25-30). Historians debate whether these new words

renamed existing fields of knowledge or signified new developments in scholarship. Fernando Vidal (2011) takes the former position and illustrates ways in which sixteenth-century (and later) interest in the psyche (sometimes but by no means always called *psychologia*) encompassed theological, Aristotelian, Galenic and moral topics (e.g. control of the passions). In contrast, Paul Mengal (2005) argues that in the late sixteenth century, particularly in the universities of Marburg and Leiden, a specific discipline, *psychologia*, developed as an Aristotelian science of the soul. This discipline, Mengal states, treated the soul as a topic for study like other natural things, bringing it under the heading of *physica*, or natural philosophy, in the curriculum and, to some extent, discussing the soul independently of theological interests. Both Vidal and Mengal find here the roots of modern academic psychology; but Mengal describes the emergence of a definite discipline, whereas Vidal emphasises more the range and variety of headings under which sciences (in the plural) of the soul developed. This historical work still leaves for study the way in which early modern science(s) of the soul became modern sciences of the mind. (It is necessary to remember that the words 'soul' and 'mind' have very different connotations in modern English.)

I think this and related work has in recent years transformed our knowledge of the early history of psychology. Other work includes a series of papers by Gary Hatfield (in particular 1995, 1997), who argues that philosophical discussion of topics which modern authors would recognise as belonging to psychology (topics like perception and cognition) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries constituted a discipline of psychology long before the second half of the nineteenth century and the contributions of Wundt and his contemporaries. Writing a very different kind of history, Christopher Goodey (2011) examines the roots of reference to intelligence (understood as a mental capacity differing between individual people) in Calvinist debates in the seventeenth century. His argument is that Calvinist theology required people to understand the conditions of God's Grace; and this posed the problem of what to do about those who did not have such a capacity of understanding. His work shifts the focus of the history of psychology towards religious and moral practices. Among professional psychologists, the Canadian social psychologist, Kurt Danziger, has had the largest impact. *Constructing the Subject* (1990) focuses on the early twentieth century and shows how, through

laboratory work, scientific psychologists actually constructed what they studied, that is, the experimental subject. Then, in *Naming the Mind* (1997), Danziger argues for historical study of the development of the categories psychologists use (like emotion, intelligence, personality), while in *Marking the Mind* (2008), he exemplifies his argument with a study of memory from ancient to modern times, showing how references to memory have referenced very different things.

In my own work (Smith 1997, 2008a, 2008b, 2013), I write broadly about the Western development of concepts of human nature, studying the relations between biological, social and humanistic approaches. I try to characterise psychology as a cluster of related, modern approaches to what it is to be a human being. The range of activities called psychology is vast. At one end of the spectrum of opinion, there are materialist neuropsychologists who state that 'we are our brains' and that psychology is therefore the science of brain functions; at the other end of opinion, there are religious psychologists (such as Catholic and Orthodox scholars) who start from the God-given nature of the soul. There are also the many practising psychologists (like counsellors) who work with people but have no systematic philosophical position. And then, in contemporary Western societies, ordinary people have, in a way, become psychologists too, since they think about individual and collective identity, and about personal or social life and their problems, in terms of psychological ideas and realities. I have tried to write the history of this variety for the audience in the humanities disciplines, and among the public, concerned to understand and debate what it is to be a human. I try especially to explain why understanding requires historical knowledge (Smith 2007/2014).

Earlier writers on the history of psychology focused on explaining when and how psychology became a science. This gave the history of psychology a focus. Yet it was not satisfactory because it excluded the history of the way psychology developed as a range of practices related to human well-being. It also excluded discussion of what makes a discipline as science. The Aristotelian science of the soul in sixteenth century Leiden or Marburg was deductive and theoretical; the science of psychology in Leipzig in the late nineteenth century was experimental, but also involved cultural psychology; US behaviourists made psychology a science by observing physical variables like any other natural science; while D. F.-F.-J. Mercier (later Cardinal Mercier), in Louvain or Leuven, supported teaching in experimental psychology as a contribution to Thomist

philosophy. Even within single countries, like Russia, there have been very different views about what makes psychology a science. (For an overview of Russia, Sirotkina and Smith 2012.) In tsarist times, psychology existed both as the science of the soul and as experimental research; in the 1920s there was argument about the Marxist-Leninist nature of the science; then so-called Pavlovian theory dominated public statements about the science of psychology; then Leont'ev defined scientific psychology as activity theory; and so on. M. G. Yaroshevskii, the centenary of whose birth comes this year, led the way in the late Soviet period to bring all this into the history of the field.

What constructive conclusions do I draw from these comments? First, we should value historical work on specific, particular local topics, which should include analysis of concepts as well as stating facts. Statements about psychology in general have limited value. Secondly, historical work has to be collaborative, comparative and international. Thirdly, we can be confident history of psychology has great intellectual interest: it is a field that continuously examines and debates the framework and purposes for which studies of being human, including the range of studies called psychology, are undertaken. Fourthly, the history of psychology is not just 'there', waiting to be described. Historians *select* what they say according to their purpose and audience. Lastly, historians must learn the arts of good writing and communication in order to have an audience and demonstrate the intellectual and cultural interest of what they do.

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Abstract. The author presents the review of a range of concepts of psychology. The history of psychology has a great interest and value as thanks to it we can understand the process of development of psychology throughout the centuries. The history of psychology is a debate field that historians of science should design and provide.

Keywords: psychology, concept, subject of psychology, history of psychology, intellectual history.



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