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INTERNATIONALIZING
the History of
PSYCHOLOGY

EDITED BY

Adrian C. Brock

Internationalizing the
History of Psychology

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Introduction

Adrian C. Brock

Difference between U.S. History and World History

The title of this section is meant to be tongue in cheek, but it does have a serious purpose. Many psychologists acquire their knowledge of the history of psychology from one or more of the glossy American textbooks on the subject. This is especially true of the vast majority of psychologists who do not go on to become specialists in the area. The textbooks not only are read and studied by Americans but also are widely used in other English-speaking countries, such as Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Australia. The works are also very often translated into other languages, such as Spanish, for use in non-English-speaking countries. The ramifications of this topic, therefore, go well beyond the United States.

The reason American textbooks are so widely used is due partly to the sheer size of the population of the United States and partly to the sheer size of its psychology “industry.” Another factor may be that history of psychology is widely taught in the United States, whereas it is not a priority in many other countries. For example, the university in Manchester, England, where I did my undergraduate degree, offered only a brief sketch of the history of psychology, which was provided as part of an introduction to the subject in the first year. The same was true of the university in Dublin, Ireland, where I currently teach, until I arrived. All these factors taken together mean the potential market for history of psychology textbooks in other countries is so small that it is not economically viable to produce their own. American textbooks tend to be used instead.

What kind of a view of the history of psychology can be found in these texts? There is certainly a great deal on the history of psychology in the

United States, as one might expect. That can be expected not only because the textbooks are American but also because American psychology has been influential throughout the world. We therefore find accounts of American “pioneers” like William James, G. Stanley Hall, and James McKeen Cattell. We also find accounts of behaviorists like John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, as well as humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Even the approaches to psychology that European refugees brought to the United States, mainly psychoanalysis and Gestalt psychology, are given their due.

Some of the Europeans whose early work shaped the course of psychology are covered as well. Thus we have, for example, accounts of the work of Gustav Fechner and Wilhelm Wundt in Germany; the work of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton in England; and the work of Jean-Martin Charcot and Alfred Binet in France. Even the work of Ivan Pavlov in Russia is covered. It may look as if the history of psychology is already a very international field. Why, then, would anyone suggest that it is in need of internationalization?

If we scratch the surface of this comfortable picture, all is not what it seems. The European figures in these textbooks all have one thing in common: their work had an influence in the United States. Thus Wundt is included because he had American students, and some of the Gestalt psychologists are included because they emigrated to the United States. However, figures such as Felix Krüger and Willy Hellpach, who were important in the German context but who had no American connections, are not. Krüger was a former student of Wundt who eventually became Wundt’s successor at Leipzig University in 1917. He was one of the most important psychologists in Germany between the wars. Hellpach was a central figure in the establishment of social and cross-cultural psychology in Germany and even stood as a presidential candidate in the elections of that country in 1925. Neither is typically mentioned in the American texts.¹

Another example is Karl Bühler, who was the head of the Vienna Psychological Institute between the wars and one of the most important psychologists of the time. He was so important that when William McDougall left Harvard University to take up a position at Duke University in 1927, Bühler was offered his chair. He decided to turn the offer down. It was an unfortunate decision, for when Bühler eventually came to the United States as a refugee from the Nazis at the end of the 1930s, he had little success. He was unable to obtain a permanent position at a major American university and died in relative obscurity in Los Angeles in 1963 (Brock,

1994). Because he had little success in the United States, Bühler is rarely, if ever, mentioned in American texts.

This selectivity even operates with the different aspects of a psychologist's work. Thus Kurt Lewin's work in the United States is well known, but his work in Germany prior to his emigration is not (Danziger, 1990).

There is nothing unique about German psychologists in this regard. For example, only two British psychologists have ever had the distinction of being knighted: Sir Frederic Bartlett and Sir Cyril Burt. Neither is typically mentioned in the American texts.

This brings us to the first rule of inclusion/exclusion in the history of psychology:

Rule #1: If your work did not have a major impact on American psychology, however influential it might have been elsewhere, it does not count.

One could argue in response to this assertion that the most important people in the history of psychology are those whose work had an international impact and that this impact would have been felt in the United States.

There are several problems with this argument, but one of them is that the same situation does not apply in reverse; namely, the American psychologists who are included in these histories did not always have a major impact overseas. Referring to recent attempts to write the history of psychology from a European perspective, Danziger writes:

Major themes in the American context, like behaviorism, are relegated to minor footnotes, and other themes, unknown to American psychologists, become highly significant. Important developments for American psychology, like the cognitive revolution, turn out to be non-events from a European perspective, because of the existence of a local cognitivist tradition that never managed to cross the Atlantic. (1994, pp. 476–477)

Many American psychologists assume that behaviorism was equally influential throughout the world and thus speak of a “cognitive revolution” in the 1960s. This will only work if one's horizons extend no further than the United States because behaviorism had a very limited impact overseas. European psychologists like Piaget, Vygotsky, Bartlett, and the Gestalt psychologists did not abandon the study of “mind.” This difference explains why the work of Piaget and Vygotsky from the 1920s and 1930s

was belatedly “discovered” by American psychologists in the 1960s after the influence of behaviorism began to wane. Similarly, attempts were made to export humanistic psychology to other countries but with equally limited success.

This brings us the second rule of inclusion/exclusion in the history of psychology:

Rule #2: If your work had a major impact on American psychology, even though its influence was limited or nonexistent elsewhere, it is an important part of the history of psychology.

All this is leading in one direction: the content of these textbooks is not the history of psychology at all. It is the history of American psychology. European psychologists are included if, and only if, they had an influence in the United States. This is why there is a preponderance of European figures, like Wundt and Freud, in the early part of the history of psychology when American psychology was relatively undeveloped. It is impossible to write a history of American psychology without reference to them. This is not the case once American psychology has become established. The European psychologists who are included from later years are mainly refugees who came to the United States. These include psychoanalytic theorists, like Fromm, Horney, and Erikson, and the Gestalt psychologists.

Let me stress here that there is nothing wrong with writing a history of psychology in the United States (e.g., Popplestone and McPherson, 1999), just as there is nothing wrong with writing a history of psychology in Argentina (Rossi, 1994), India (Sinha, 1986), or the Netherlands (Dehue, 1995). That is not the issue at stake. The important point here is that no one would ever confuse the history of psychology in Argentina, India, or the Netherlands with the history of psychology as such, and yet this has happened with the history of psychology in the United States. American textbooks are usually local histories masquerading as universal histories.

This situation may go some way toward explaining the third rule of inclusion/exclusion in the history of psychology:

Rule #3: Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania do not exist.

If we accept that what is taken to be the history of psychology is actually the history of American psychology, the exclusion of these countries makes eminent sense. As previously mentioned, Europe is included in

American histories of psychology because this is where psychology first appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century and it was the leader of the field until the dawn of the twentieth century. Moreover, there were several European refugees from the 1930s who had a major impact on American psychology. It is therefore impossible to provide an adequate account of the history of American psychology without any reference to Europe.

This is not the case with Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania, where psychology was less influential or developed relatively late. It is therefore quite possible to write a history of American psychology without any reference to these parts of the world. While it true that these regions have traditionally been importers, rather than exporters, of psychological knowledge, it does not mean that nothing of interest to historians of psychology happened there. This situation can become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. We know nothing about the history of psychology in these countries and therefore assume that there is nothing to know, or at least nothing of any significance. Having made that assumption, we will never know if the assumption is correct.

How This Situation Came About

Foreigners are often surprised at how little Americans in general know about the rest of the world. Explanations that are sometimes used include the size of the United States and the fact that it has oceans on both sides. Although it has traditionally been a country of immigrants, it has also pursued the policy of the “melting pot.” Less charitable observers have resorted to terms like “arrogant.” Many Americans find the latter offensive and understandably so. However, even the more charitable explanations fail to convince.

The basic problem with these explanations is that they cannot account for the historical changes that have taken place in relations between the United States and the rest of the world. This is as true of the history of American psychology as it is of American politics. It is well known that Europe was the center of psychology during the early years of its existence. This was a time when many Americans obtained German Ph.D.’s. Becoming fluent in German in order to obtain their Ph.D.’s appears to have been no hardship. Even then the United States was a big country, and it had oceans on both sides. Intercontinental travel was also more difficult

than it is now. In addition to the younger Americans who studied in Europe, there were older figures, like James and Hall, who traveled to Europe to keep themselves abreast of developments there (Danziger, chapter 11 in this volume).

In the first decade of the twentieth century, American psychology grew to the point where it overshadowed European psychology in size, and it was less common for Americans to study in Europe, even before the outbreak of World War I. The United States has continued to be the most important center for psychology ever since. However, the story of historical variation does not stop there as the importance of American psychology in relation to the rest of the world has continued to vary ever since (e.g., Gielen and Pagan, 1994; Hogan, 1995; Rosenzweig, 1999).

The situation in the 1920s was like a marathon race where American psychology was in the lead, but the chasing pack was not very far behind. As marathon runners tend to do in such situations, American psychology had to constantly look over its shoulders to see what the others were doing. Hogan and Vaccaro (chapter 7 in this volume) paint a very interesting picture of American psychology in this period. American psychologists were much more familiar with foreign languages than they are today, and American journals tended to have more international editorial boards. When the International Congress of Psychology came to the United States in 1929, the American Psychological Association (APA) canceled its annual meeting so that its members could attend the International Congress instead. This is the only year in which APA has not held an annual meeting since it was founded in 1892.

This situation had changed dramatically by the end of World War II. Much of Europe lay in ruins, especially Germany, which had the strongest tradition of psychology in Europe before the war. German psychology also had to contend with the suspicion that it might in some way be connected to Nazism. At the same time, psychology had yet to be established in many countries outside Europe. American psychology reigned supreme: to use the metaphor of the marathon runner, there was now a huge gap between it and the chasing pack.

This situation did not, and could not, last forever. European psychology not only got back on its feet in the postwar years but also began to expand. For example, psychology existed in the United Kingdom only in particular places, such as Cambridge and London. Even Oxford did not have a psychology department. Most British universities began to establish psychology departments after the war. There were even European countries,

such as Ireland and Spain, where psychology hardly existed. These, too, experienced significant growth, as did many countries outside Europe. The various chapters in Sexton and Hogan (1992) provide more details of this growth.

American psychology continued to grow during these years as well, but the potential for growth was obviously much less than it was in a country where psychology scarcely existed or did not exist at all. The end result is that the percentage of psychologists in the world who live and work in the United States, and the proportion of psychological research emanating from the United States, has continued to decline. The international situation in psychology is slowly moving back to the situation of the 1920s; that is, the marathon runner is still in the lead, but the chasing pack is beginning to catch up.

There has been a corresponding change in American psychology in recent years. A division for "International Psychology" (Division 52) was established within the APA in the mid-1990s, and *American Psychologist* has undertaken to devote more space to international affairs (Fowler, 1996).² There has also been a spate of publications on international psychology, of which the well-known book by Sexton and Hogan (1992), *International Psychology*, is but one. The present work should be seen in the context of these developments. There was probably no time in the history of psychology when American psychologists could afford to ignore developments overseas, but such ignorance is now an even riskier strategy than it once was.

The history of psychology has a unique role in this move toward "internationalization." History is often a controversial subject because our views of the present help to shape our views of the past, just as our views of the past help to shape our views of the present. Thus if we confuse the history of American psychology with the history of psychology itself, we are less likely to take an international view of the field. A more international history of psychology is, therefore, an essential basis for a more international psychology.

What Is to Be Done?

I have some sympathy for textbook authors who might have read my critique. So the history of psychology is really the history of American psychology. Do we now start producing textbooks of 5,000 instead of 500

pages in order to put this situation right? That is clearly no solution. It may also be difficult to decide which aspects of the history of American psychology should be left out in order to make way for a more international history. A further problem involves identifying the information that has been left out. It is not as if everyone knows what this information is and has deliberately decided to omit it. The information is simply not known, and it will take a great deal of original research before it becomes known. Whether or not this research is likely to be done is discussed below.

For the moment, I focus on the pedagogical aspects of the situation. The history of psychology is very unusual as far as specialities within psychology go. It is unusual in that the pedagogical aspects of the subject dwarf original research in size. Indeed, history of psychology existed as a pedagogical branch of psychology long before it occurred to anyone to do any original research (Brock, 1998).

The basis of my own solution to these problems can be found at the start of Kurt Danziger's chapter in this book. Danziger points out that history is inevitably selective. One human life is not long enough to cover everything that has happened in the history of psychology, let alone one university course or one text. Selections must inevitably be made, even if we are not aware of the selection or the criteria that have been used. The best we can hope for is to be aware that selection occurs and to make our selections wisely.

I was made aware of this problem at the start of my career, and so I have never made an attempt to be comprehensive in my courses. Currently, I teach two history of psychology courses. One is to the first-year undergraduates who have come straight from high school and, in most cases, have no prior knowledge of psychology. Here I give them some intellectual biographies, using Fancher's *Pioneers of Psychology* and similar work (Fancher, 1996). I am more than happy if they come away from the course with some knowledge of who people like Pavlov, Skinner, and Piaget were and what they did. Note that there is no attempt at comprehensiveness here. Selections have been made and not only in relation to the figures who are covered. The decision to build the course around intellectual biographies involves selection of a kind since this is only one way of organizing historical information. This point is often forgotten by American historians of psychology whose work tends to be focused on individuals. I do it at this level only because it makes the material easier for the students to understand.

Perhaps more interesting is the final year undergraduate course that I

teach. Here I do not use any pedagogical literature at all. The students are usually ready for “grown-up” literature at this stage. I therefore choose a selection of books on the history of psychology that I regard as some of the best contemporary literature in the field, and we study these books in depth. Here there is no attempt at comprehensiveness whatsoever. I would rather expose my students to the ideas of writers like Danziger (1997), Hacking (1995), and Rose (1999) than fill them with useless “facts.” I am sure that the students prefer this situation as well.

International Research

Much of the literature on international psychology consists of descriptive accounts of psychology in a particular country (e.g., Gilgen and Gilgen, 1987; Sexton and Hogan, 1992). Such works have their uses, but they are hardly representative of what historians of psychology do. Perhaps the subtitle of the present work should have been “against comprehensiveness,” because no attempt at comprehensiveness was made in this work, either. I did try to make sure that there was at least some work on Asia, some work on Africa, and some work on Latin America, but that was with a view to diversity rather than comprehensiveness. These chapters are simply examples of the kind of historical work that can be written from an international perspective. This point has to be stressed because there is so much literature of the “encyclopedic” kind that some people cannot conceive of any other kind.

The general pattern in this “encyclopedic” work is to have each chapter devoted to a particular country and to get someone in that country to write the chapter. Similarly, most historians of psychology write about the history of psychology in their own countries. The programs of APA’s Division 26 (History of Psychology) and Cheiron (International Society of Behavioral and Social Sciences) contain a very high percentage of papers on the history of psychology in the United States. The same is true of North American journals like *History of Psychology* and *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*. I should add here that there is no conspiracy to prevent international research from being presented at conferences or published. I have always had a positive response when I have approached conference program chairs or journal editors with suggestions for work of this kind. However, no program chair or journal editor can include international work if no such work is received.

Europeans are no different in this regard. The European equivalent of Cheiron, ESHHS (European Society for the History of the Human Sciences) generally has papers on the history of psychology in Europe on its program, usually papers on the European country that the speaker comes from. Some of the authors in this book have also written about their own countries. The main difference here is that the countries in question (e.g., Argentina, India, South Africa, and Turkey) are very different from the countries that are usually discussed.

People may want to write on psychology in their own countries for a variety of reasons. They may feel that they know more about their own country than anywhere else. They may be interested in using archival material and need to be close to particular archives in order to do that. They may also have political agendas, such as trying to encourage their colleagues to adopt a more indigenous approach. However, I suspect that, in at least some cases, it is due to a lack of imagination.

There is no reason anyone should be confined to doing research on their own country. I am British, and I have never done any work on British psychology in my life. My early work was on the history of psychology in Germany and Austria (e.g., Brock, 1991; 1992; 1994), and I am currently interested in the history of psychology in Cuba (Brock, chapter 8 in this volume). That may be unusual, but it is far from unique. Christiane Hartnack, for example, has done research on psychoanalysis in India (Hartnack, 2001), while one of the contributors to this book, Geoffrey Blowers, is a specialist on the history of psychology in China (Blowers, 2001; chapter 5 in this volume). Why not? As long as one has the necessary linguistic skills and can cover any travel expenses, there is no reason why the work should be inferior to that of a native. Indeed, bringing the perspective of an “outsider” to the situation may be an advantage in itself (Shapin and Schaffer, 1986).

This point is particularly important because there are few specialists on the history of psychology outside Western Europe and the United States. It is not even a priority in these relatively wealthy parts of the world. It is less of a priority in countries with more pressing social concerns. Thus, as long as we continue with this assumption that people can only write about their own countries, we will continue to have a history of psychology that is mainly focused on Western Europe and the United States.

Another way in which this book differs from the more encyclopedic accounts is that the chapters are not specifically focused on countries but on theories of psychology that have broader applicability. Thus Johann

Louw (chapter 1 in this volume) contrasts his own work with work on “psychology in country x,” even though his chapter focuses on South Africa. What is the distinction that is being made? Louw’s chapter is not really about South Africa. It is about the phenomenon of “psychologization.” He discusses a thesis that was originally made in relation to Western Europe and North America and shows how it can be applied to the South African context. Similarly, my own chapter is not really about the history of psychology in Cuba. It is about an influential thesis that psychology and liberal democracy are particularly compatible, and I use evidence drawn from the Cuban context to suggest that there is no basis to this view. Thus the chapters in this book are not merely descriptive accounts of psychology around the world. They use evidence drawn from unusual contexts in order to draw conclusions about psychology in general.

A genuinely international history of psychology will place a great deal of emphasis on comparison since it is only through comparison that we can hope to find out what psychology in different countries has in common and what makes it unique. Although there are no explicitly comparative studies in this volume, an examination of psychology outside its traditional heartland of Western Europe and North America inevitably involves comparison with those places. It is very similar to anthropological work. Thus the classic studies in anthropology, such as Bronislaw Malinowski’s work on the sexual lives of the Trobriand Islanders and Margaret Mead’s work on coming of age in Samoa, were only partly about the societies they described (Malinowski, 1932; Mead, 1943). The results were also thought to have implications for the societies from which the anthropologists came. Similarly, the more recent work of Catherine Lutz on the emotions of Pacific islanders has implications for our own view of the emotions and their presumed universality (Lutz, 1988).

There is no reason why an international history should be focused on specific countries at all. Thus Irmingard Staeuble (chapter 10 in this volume) discusses the rise of international organizations like the International Union of Psychological Science. Danziger (chapter 11 in this volume) and Fathali Mogahddam and Naomi Lee (chapter 9 in this volume) are similarly concerned with relations between countries rather than solely with the countries themselves. It is this focus on international relations that makes their work genuinely international. Work on “psychology in country x” is by definition national, not international. We should be wary of replacing one kind of parochialism with another.

All of the above means that it would be inadequate to attempt to justify