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Trying to Keep it All Together: History, Theory, and Philosophy in Psychology

DARRYL B. HILL AND MICHAEL J. KRAL (EDS.), *About Psychology: Essays at the Crossroads of History, Theory, and Philosophy*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003. 182 pp. ISBN 0–7914–5703–6 (hbk), 0–7914–5704–4 (pbk).

Canadians sometimes do things differently from Americans, and one of these differences forms the basis of this book. Whereas the American Psychological Association has separate divisions for Theoretical/Philosophical Psychology (Div. 24) and History of Psychology (Div. 26), the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) has a single section for History and Philosophy of Psychology (Section 25). Far from being seen as a ‘marriage of convenience’ between two different specialities, many of its members see it as one speciality. The book’s editors are former editors of CPA Section 25’s journal/newsletter, *History and Philosophy of Psychology Bulletin*. While it was under their control, they devoted a special issue of that publication to examining the common ground between history, theory and philosophy of psychology. They now seek to examine the issue in more detail and to bring it to a wider audience.

Following the Introduction, the book opens with a strong chapter by Kurt Danziger titled ‘Where History, Theory and Philosophy Meet: The Biography of Psychological Objects’. These psychological objects—such as ‘attitudes’, ‘motivation’ and ‘personality’—were the subject of Danziger’s last book, *Naming the Mind* (1997), and of his current research on ‘memory’. As the term ‘biography’ implies, the work is historical, but it also has theoretical implications for the ‘objects’ of psychological research and is of relevance to the philosophy of language and epistemology.

Another chapter by Brent Slife et al. looks at the role of values in psychotherapy. The authors argue convincingly that it is impossible to conduct psychotherapy without values and offer some suggestions for dealing with this problem. They also try to view the situation in historical terms by portraying the modernist idea of ‘value-free science’ as a reaction against the absolutism of premodern thought and try to relate their own views to postmodern thought.

In the final chapter, Henderikus J. Stam addresses the issue of the proper role of ‘theory’ in ‘history’. In some respects, this chapter provides the complement to Danziger’s chapter at the start of the book. Whereas Danziger wants to argue that theory and philosophy need history, Stam argues that history needs theory. Even the Mr Gradgrinds who pursue only the ‘facts’ are following a theory of some kind.

Space restrictions prevent me from discussing every chapter in the book, but I hope that the above will give the reader a good idea of the topics that it contains. The chapters that I have not discussed include Charles W. Tolman on the moral dimension of psychology, Jack Martin and Jeff Sugarman on personhood, Scott Greer on the self, Karen M. Seeley on culture and psychology, and Meredith M. Kimball on gender.

I fully agree with the aims of the book. My sole criticism is that the argument could have been made more convincing with greater geographical and disciplinary diversity. Of the thirteen contributors to the book, no less than nine are psychologists based in Canada. The other four are psychologists based in the USA.

The CPA is not the only organization of psychologists that has a Section for 'History and Philosophy of Psychology'. The British Psychological Society has a much bigger section with exactly the same name (bigger in the sense that it has about five times as many members). It also publishes a journal, *History and Philosophy of Psychology*. Many of its members (e.g. Graham Richards) would fully endorse the view that this is one speciality, rather than two, as would many psychologists in Continental Europe. In 1993, Hans van Rappard and Pieter van Strien were among the editors of a special issue of *Annals of Theoretical Psychology* on the relationship between history and theory and wrote an introduction to the special issue on this very topic. It might have strengthened the argument if some psychologists from outside North America had been included.

As far as disciplinary diversity is concerned, I would assume that the name 'History and Philosophy of Psychology' was taken from what is a recognized discipline in many universities: 'History and Philosophy of Science'. Again, it might have strengthened the argument if one or two representatives of this discipline had been included, and it would not have been necessary to go far to find them. The work of Ian Hacking of the Unit for History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Toronto provides a good example of this unified historical/philosophical approach.

Such diversity is important because there is no one way of doing history, just as there is no one way of doing theory or philosophy. It therefore follows that there is no one way to relate the two. Those who have followed the debates between Kurt Danziger and Hans van Rappard in this journal will be aware that they have very different views on how to write history, and yet both believe that history is an essential component of theory, albeit to different degrees. In the final analysis, the issue of whether history, theory and philosophy are several specialities or one is itself a theoretical issue, which can, and ought to be, debated rather than assumed.

International organizations have tended to follow the American model rather than the Canadian/British one. This is equally true of most of the journals in the field (or 'fields', as the case may be). In practice, we know that there is some overlap in the membership of organizations like the International Society for Theoretical Psychology, Cheiron and the European Society for the History of the Human Sciences, just as there is some overlap between the membership of APA Division 24 and APA Division 26. However, the overlap is far from perfect. This institutional situation may encourage some to believe that history, theory and philosophy are separate activities that can be pursued independently of each other. This book will serve as a reminder that some of their members do not share this point of view.

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A Symbolic Legacy

JOHN DUPRÉ, *Darwin's Legacy: What Evolution Means Today*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 138 pp. ISBN 0-19-280337-9 (hbk).

Much of the discussion about the relevance of evolutionary theory for human behavior takes place in relatively easily accessible works by talented writers such as Steven Pinker, Richard Dawkins and the late Stephen J. Gould. Partly this is a result of the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, which makes non-specialist texts a necessity for the scholars themselves. Partly it is due to publishers who, recognizing the wider appeal, have eagerly facilitated the creation of a profitable genre of science writing. In this 'evolution and behavior' genre, skeptics such as Steven Rose and Richard Lewontin take up a much smaller space on the academic bookstores' shelves than the enthusiasts, and Gould's death has robbed their camp of its most popular and arguably most influential author. British philosopher John Dupré now steps into the fray with his first book aimed at 'the general reader' (p. 10). Dupré is a philosopher of science who has written earlier about more arcane biological topics such as taxonomy, but has turned his attention increasingly to evolutionary approaches to human behavior, resulting recently in two collections of essays, *Human Nature and the Limits of Science* (2001) and *Humans and Other Animals* (2002), both of which contain a number of essays critical of evolutionary psychology. In *Darwin's Legacy*, Dupré now presents his arguments in digested form to a wider audience.

The legacy in question, Dupré contends, is not made up of the hard cash of specific explanations for specific features of organisms, but of the symbolic capital of a general view of nature and our place in it. The meaning of Darwinism is largely metaphysical: it provides a crucial pillar to support a thoroughly naturalistic world view. Dupré finds himself 'in disconcerting accord with Richard Dawkins and Christian fundamentalists' in arguing there really is an unavoidable contradiction between evolution and religious belief, since 'Darwinism undermines the only remotely plausible reason for believing in the existence of God' (p. 56), namely the argument from design. The core of evolutionary thought—descent with modification—is a hard fact, despite the protestations of those who say it is just a theory (Dupré proposes that the phrase 'the theory of evolution' be outlawed), but beyond that it consists of a collection of theories with varying degrees of certainty. Natural selection, in particular, is of great importance in evolutionary processes, but Dupré emphasizes that its role should not be overestimated. The course of evolution is shaped by other factors as well, such as self-organization of complex systems and, most importantly, the contingencies of history. Like Gould before him, Dupré points to the role of chance in the evolution of organisms. Moreover, organisms are such