
The History of Introspection Revisited

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Introspection was less a victim of its intrinsic problems than a casualty of historical forces far bigger than itself.

—Danziger (1980, 259).

My involvement with this topic goes back a long way. The first research I ever did on the history of psychology was a master's thesis on the so-called "imageless thought controversy" that I wrote in 1987. A summary of this research was subsequently published as a book chapter (Brock 1991). It was on the basis of this research that I was recommended to the editor of the present volume. My first reaction on being asked to write another chapter on the history of introspection was to say that the topic had already been thoroughly investigated and I was not sure that I could add much to the research that was new. His response was to say that the target audience for the book was not specialist historians of psychology and so many of its readers would not be familiar with this research. He also suggested that the book would be lacking if it did not contain some historical material. I accepted these points and agreed to write a chapter on this basis. I mention it so that no one will expect the chapter to contain groundbreaking new research. It is more a summary of the research that I and others, mainly Kurt Danziger (1980, 1990, 2001), have already published in the specialist literature on the history of psychology and it is directed to the nonspecialist reader.

The starting point of my account is a view that is widely held among psychologists to the effect that introspection was once the favored method of psychology. The names of the Wilhelm Wundt and Edward B. Titchener are often mentioned in this connection. It is also held

that the use of introspection led to unresolvable controversies because introspection is essentially a private affair. According to this view, which tends to be assumed rather than debated, I can tell you what is going on in my mind but I have no idea what is going on in yours. It is also said to be because of this situation that the founder of behaviorism, John B. Watson, argued that psychology should be based on publicly observable behavior and it has done this ever since. For much of the twentieth century, psychologists restricted themselves to accounts of human and animal behavior and did not concern themselves with minds or mental events. From the 1960s onwards, behaviorism was replaced by cognitive psychology, which did not share the same reticence with regard to mental events. On the contrary, it concerned itself with topics like a memory and attention, and even mental imagery, but it did so on the basis of behavioral rather than introspective evidence. Thus, even postbehaviorist psychology has not abandoned this long-standing commitment to methodological behaviorism.

The traditional view of the history of introspection can be found in introductory textbooks on psychology and in textbooks on the history of psychology. It can also be found in the work of eminent scholars in the field (Brock 1991, 1993; Costall 2006). It is sometimes communicated in the classroom. One of the more curious aspects of human knowledge is that anyone who wants to challenge an accepted view will usually be expected to provide copious evidence in support of that challenge but someone who is expressing an accepted view is usually not required to present any supporting evidence at all. It is partly because of this situation that popular myths are able to survive.

For those who do not know it yet, the traditional view of these events is a mythical account. History is a messy affair and does not usually lend itself to being divided up into neat stages. Although it is true that introspection enjoyed a brief period of popularity in the first decade of the twentieth century, it has never been the dominant approach to psychology at any time in its history. It also did not disappear from the discipline in the years that behaviorism prevailed. Our first task is, therefore, to provide a more accurate account of the history of introspection in psychology.

The Philosophical Background

Introspection no doubt has its origins in traditional religious practices, such as the examination of one's conscience, but the term did not appear in the English language until the end of the seventeenth

century (Danziger 2001; Lyons 1986). It is, of course, derived from the Latin words for “to look within.” The use of the term is closely linked to the rise of empiricism in British philosophy. One of the key figures in this movement, John Locke, famously argued that knowledge is based on experience and he believed that we had two types of experience, experience of an external physical world and experience of an inner mental world. The former was experienced through the traditional senses and the term “inner sense” was frequently used to account for our ability to experience the latter. It should be noted that these views did not extend to Continental Europe where figures like Leibniz and Kant believed that rational enquiry, rather than conscious experience, was the royal road to understanding the mind (Danziger 1980).

Introspection was the main method used by British philosophers of mind prior to the establishment of modern psychology but it was not without its critics. The father of positivism, Auguste Comte, had little time for traditional psychology and believed that phrenology would be the key to understanding the human mind. He famously argued that we cannot split ourselves into two so that one part of the mind can engage in complex tasks while the other part observes it engaging in these tasks. He also suggested in an argument that was later to be widely adopted by psychologists, that the results of introspection were unreliable (Wilson 1991). John Stuart Mill was a follower of Comte in some respects but he was also one of the heirs to the British empiricist tradition and he defended introspection with what subsequently came to be a standard response to the criticism that Comte had made: He argued that there was no need to split the mind into two; we could engage in complex tasks and then recall what we had done while our memories of them were still fresh. This view is frequently described in the literature as “introspection as retrospection.”

A common language and culture led to British philosophy being particularly influential in the United States in the nineteenth century and so William James held similar views. In his famous book, *Principles of Psychology*, he vividly described his conscious experience (James 1890). James regarded introspection as the main method of psychology and also defended it against the criticisms of Comte. For example, in response to the claim that the results of introspection were unreliable, he argued that all observation was fallible and introspection was no different in this respect (James 1894). James owes his eminent position in the history of psychology to the fact that he was the first person in the United States to become aware of the developments that were

taking place in experimental psychology in Europe and to make them widely known among his contemporaries. In spite of this, he was not a typical psychologist. He once famously said that psychophysics could only have arisen in a country where the natives were incapable of being bored. He also became disillusioned with psychology, describing it as “a nasty little subject,” and devoted himself to philosophy in his later years (James 1920).

The Beginnings of Experimental Psychology

Wilhelm Wundt was more representative of the spirit of the new psychology. He established what many people consider to be the first laboratory for experimental psychology, with the date usually being given as 1879. He also wrote its first textbook and published its first journal. Perhaps most important of all, he trained around 150 graduate students from different parts of the world, many of whom went back to their own countries and established laboratories for experimental psychology along similar lines. Even James imported one of Wundt’s former students, Hugo Münsterberg, to take charge of the laboratory at Harvard University.

It is somewhat strange that Wundt came to be regarded as the arch-introspectionist in the early history of psychology since he did not share the commitment of James to this method. One point that is often overlooked is that Wundt devoted a great deal of his life to a subject that he called “Völkerpsychologie” (Wundt 1900–1920). The term is usually translated as social or cultural psychology by English-language writers but there is actually no direct equivalent for the term in English. The word, “Volk” can mean “people” or “nation” in German and so the literal translation of Völkerpsychologie is either “the psychology of peoples” or “the psychology of nations.” It was concerned with those aspects of mental life that members of linguistic and cultural communities had in common and could not be explained in terms of individual consciousness. Its main method was to examine the cultural products of these communities, in particular language, myth, and custom (Wundt 1888; see also Danziger 1983). Introspection was completely irrelevant in this task since it was centered on the individual mind.

Wundt’s experimental psychology was concerned with the individual mind but it relied to a large extent on behavioral measures like reaction times (Danziger 1980, 1990). Wundt was not a behaviorist, however, and his psychology did incorporate the results of subjective

reports, though it was a limited form of introspection, if it can be described as introspection at all. He accepted the argument of Comte that we could not divide ourselves into two and compared the introspector to Baron von Münchhausen who claimed to have pulled himself out of a swamp with his pigtail (Wundt 1887). Wundt also did not accept the argument of Mill that introspection can operate by way of retrospection, arguing that we were unlikely to be able to remember something that we were incapable of observing in the first place. In order for subjective reports to be valid, they had to be tied to external events and repeatable. The kind of thing that Wundt had in mind was psychophysics where two physical objects, weights for example, could be presented to a blindfolded subject and the difference between them increased until a just noticeable difference could be found. This is not introspection in the usual sense of the term.

Part of the problem here is that “introspection” was not used in German at the time and it would be naive in the extreme to think that the concepts and categories of every language are exactly the same. The closest term in German was “Selbstbeobachtung,” which literally translates as “self-observation.” This term also exists in English and it does not have exactly the same meaning as “introspection” since it does not necessarily involve “looking within.” It can also be used to describe observations of our own behavior. In a paper titled “Selbstbeobachtung und innere Wahrnehmung” (“Self-observation and inner perception”), Wundt expressed his opposition to traditional introspection or “Selbstbeobachtung” and contrasted it with what he called “inner perception.” The latter involved reports of subjective experience that were tied to external stimuli and repeatable. It is unfortunate that influential English-language authors, such as Boring (1953), translated both of these terms as “introspection,” with the result that the subtle differences between them were overlooked. One of the problems that anyone writing a history of introspection has to face is the way in which diverse practices have been lumped together under this label. This is all part of the legacy of behaviorism. As Boring (1953) noted: “Introspectionism got its *ism* because protesting new schools needed a clear and stable background against which to exhibit their novel features” (172).

The Next Generation of Experimental Psychologists

How did Wundt come to be mistakenly characterized as an “introspectionist”? The question can be answered on different levels

but the origins of the problem lie with his former student, Edward B. Titchener. Titchener was an Englishman who had studied philosophy in Oxford prior to traveling to Leipzig to do his PhD in experimental psychology. It was in Oxford that he was immersed in British empiricist philosophy and this was the basis of his approach to psychology. Like his empiricist predecessors, he believed that introspection was the key to understanding the mind (Titchener 1912a, 1912b). Also, like his empiricist predecessors, he believed that complex thought could be broken down into its sensory components. The main difference between him and his empiricist predecessors was that he used experimental methods to accomplish this task rather than examining the content of his own mind. Titchener spent only two years in Leipzig and had very little contact with Wundt during this time. Wundt was officially a professor of philosophy and he published extensively on traditional philosophical topics like ethics, logic, and metaphysics. He had temporarily put experimental psychology to one side in order to pursue these other interests and had left the day-to-day running of his laboratory to his assistants. On completing his studies in Leipzig, Titchener found that British universities had been slow to take an interest in the new field of experimental psychology and so he looked for employment in the United States. He found it at Cornell University in upstate New York where he spent the rest of his career.

Titchener was very much at odds with the mainstream of American psychology, partly because of his elitist Oxford background. He believed that psychology needed to establish itself as a science before it could develop useful applications. It was possible for him to pursue what he considered to be “pure science” from his tenured position at Cornell but many American psychologists did not have the luxury of pursuing knowledge that would have no practical applications. They relied on funding from advertisers, industrialists, educational administrators and the like, and they would only provide support for psychological research if it resulted in knowledge that they considered to be useful. Titchener’s estrangement from the mainstream of American psychology can be seen from the fact that he withdrew from the American Psychological Association, believing it to have been taken over by “mental testers,” and founded his own rival Society of Experimental Psychologists, an organization which still exists today.

Titchener liked to portray himself as Wundt’s loyal disciple in the United States. This was no doubt due to the fact that he was such a marginal figure. Wundt made himself very unpopular in the United

States during World War I when he passionately argued Germany's case but prior to that his name carried a certain amount of prestige. He had after all trained many of the first generation of American psychologists. Titchener's psychology was still rooted in the British empiricist tradition. It was more a matter of *claiming* to be a loyal disciple of Wundt rather than actually being one. He is far from unique in this regard. I have lost count of the number of psychologists I have encountered over the years who have claimed, and continued to claim, that their views on psychology are the same as those of Wundt. I have also never found a single instance where the claim was true. Politicians who are standing for election will often seek the endorsement of senior figures in their party and psychologists sometimes engage in a similar strategy to gain support from their views. There is, of course, no figure in the history of psychology who is more "senior" than Wundt.

Titchener's attempt to reconstruct Wundt in his own image became a major problem for the history of psychology largely due to the influence of his student, E. G. Boring, whose work has already been mentioned. Boring wrote a textbook on the history of experimental psychology, which was first published in 1929 and which appeared as a second edition in 1950 (Boring 1929, 1950). This textbook was widely used in classes on the history of psychology and came to be regarded as an authoritative source. It was unfortunate from the point of view of gaining accurate knowledge since Boring rarely checked the original sources of his work. His interest in the history of psychology had been sparked off by the lectures of Titchener and much of what he wrote about Wundt was derived from these lectures.

It should be noted in Boring's defense that he was writing at a time before the history of psychology became an area of specialist research. This did not happen until the 1960s in the United States and even later elsewhere (Ash 1983; Brock 1998). Prior to that it was an exclusively pedagogical field and the broad sweep of Boring's textbook made it virtually impossible for him to check the original sources. This has been a problem for textbook writers ever since, a problem that is discussed in more detail below. It should also be noted that Boring pointed to some important differences between Wundt and Titchener but the stories of Titchener's devotion to Wundt became increasingly exaggerated over the years so that their approaches to psychology were thought to be exactly the same (Brock 1993; Danziger 1979a).

Titchener was not the only former student of Wundt who advocated the use of introspection. Another was Oswald Külpe, who served as

Wundt's assistant and right-hand man for several years. It is very likely that Titchener had more contact with Külpe than he had with Wundt during the two years that he spent in Leipzig. One of the tasks that Wundt gave to Külpe during the early 1890s was to write an introductory textbook on psychology. Wundt had written a standard work on experimental psychology in the 1870s, which was constantly updated and served as a kind of handbook for the field. It was, however, directed at people who already had some knowledge of the field. As Wundt's lectures on psychology became increasingly popular in the university, he found that he needed an introductory text. Külpe duly carried out this task and published a book with the title, *Grundriss der Psychologie* (*Outline of Psychology*) in 1893 (Külpe 1893). Wundt was extremely disappointed with this work and published his own textbook with exactly the same title in 1895 (Wundt 1895). The main problem was that Külpe had made public his differences with Wundt in the book. It was mentioned earlier that Wundt devoted a great deal of his life to a subject that he called "Völkerpsychologie" and that this was concerned with the cultural products of human communities. Wundt assigned the study of what he called the "higher" mental functions, such as language and thought, to this field, arguing that they were essentially social and could not be understood by studying isolated individuals in the laboratory. Thus, experimental psychology, according to Wundt, had a very limited role. It was on this point that Külpe departed from Wundt and suggested that there is no part of psychology that could not be studied using experimental methods, a view that Titchener would have endorsed. Both Külpe and Titchener represented a new generation of psychologists who believed that experimentation was the only appropriate method for psychology and it is interesting to note that it was Külpe's textbook that Titchener translated into English rather than that of Wundt (Külpe 1895; see also Danziger 1979a).

Külpe's departure from the views of his mentor must have made life difficult for him in Leipzig and he accepted an offer to set up his own Psychological Institute at the University of Würzburg in 1895. He gathered around him a group of able researchers who set out to conduct experiments on thought and the favored method for doing this was what they called "systematische experimentelle Selbstbeobachtung," which is literally "systematic experimental self-observation," but which has traditionally been translated as "systematic experimental introspection." As mentioned earlier, the word "introspection" did not exist in the German language at the time. The Würzburg

researchers also claimed to have discovered a phenomenon which they called “Bewusstseinslagen.” The term has no direct equivalent in English. It was translated by Titchener and his students as “conscious attitudes” (e.g., Clarke 1911), though it is perhaps best translated as “states of consciousness” (Ach 1905; see also Brock 1991). It is these “Bewusstseinslagen” that subsequently came to be characterized as “imageless thought.” However, if one reads the original works of Würzburg researchers, it was not the lack of sensory images that was their defining characteristic. It was Titchener who believed that thought was accompanied by sensory images and it was he who was offended by the suggestion that there could be such a thing as imageless thought. This is just one example of the way in which psychologists in English-speaking countries have come to see the controversy from Titchener’s point of view. It is for this reason that I tend to use scare quotes when referring to the “imageless thought” controversy.

The “Imageless Thought” Controversy

It was Wundt who fired the first salvoes in the controversy. He was concerned not so much with the findings of the Würzburg psychologists but with the methods that they used to obtain them. It was the work of Karl Bühler that particularly offended him (e.g., Bühler 1907). Bühler had given his research participants a complex problem, got them to solve the problem and then asked them how they had arrived at the answer. This was the classic method of “introspection as retrospection” and Wundt’s opposition to it was entirely consistent with the views that he had expressed in his paper from 1887 where he had opposed the use of “self-observation” and contrasted it with “inner perception,” which was tied to external objects and repeatable. Wundt (1907) referred to Bühler’s use of what he called the “interview method” (*Ausfragemethode*) and dismissed the work as “pseudo-experiments” (*Scheinexperimente*).

It was some time later when Titchener entered the fray. Being an advocate of introspection, he did not share Wundt’s views on this subject and openly stated that he did not agree with them. Titchener subscribed to the classic empiricist view that complex thought could be broken down into its sensory components and much of his experimental work, as well as that of his students, was carried out with this aim in mind. He was not willing to accept the existence of imageless thought and tried to explain away the Würzburg results by suggesting that they had committed what he called the “stimulus error.”

This involved confusing the object of thought with the thoughts themselves. He also suggested that the “Bewusstseinslagen” were accompanied by weak kinesthetic images which had been merely overlooked (Titchener 1909).

A few observations need to be made about the controversy here. According to the traditional view, it was the essentially private nature of introspection which had led to this impasse. This was definitely not the case as far as Wundt was concerned. His involvement in the controversy was the result of his opposition to introspection in the way that the term is usually understood. Also, if we look at the work of the advocates of introspection around this time, we will find little evidence that introspection is essentially a private affair. As I pointed out in my master’s dissertation many years ago, the disagreement did not center on different reports from isolated individuals. It was a clash of two different *schools*. The two schools of psychology differed in important respects but the members of each school were in agreement (Brock 1987, 1991). In this respect, it was no different from many of the other controversies that have occurred in the history of science.

The traditional view of these events also gives the impression that scientific controversy is a kind of aberration. It encourages the view that scientists are mere collectors of “facts” and that there will be no disagreement between them if they deal with publicly observable facts. I probably do not need to point out that there is little evidence from the history of psychology to support such a view. The results of intelligence tests are publicly observable and yet this has not prevented the existence of controversy surrounding them over the years. In fact, as a Boring (1929) wryly noted, the adoption of behaviorism did not lead to psychologists being in agreement with each other. On the contrary, different schools of behaviorism began to emerge. The inescapable conclusion is that the total abandonment of introspection in response to the controversy was neither justified nor inevitable.

The Rise of Behaviorism

In fact, behaviorism was not a response to the controversy. It is certainly true that John B. Watson’s “behaviorist manifesto,” as it has come to be known, appeared in 1913 when memories of the controversy were still fresh. There is little evidence in his article to suggest that he had adopted behaviorism as a result of the failure of introspectors to agree. He briefly mentions the “imageless thought” controversy in

a footnote but this seems to be little more than an attempt to exploit the perceived weakness of his opponents (163). Watson (1936) traced his own views on the subject back to 1904 before the controversy had even begun. There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that Watson's ideas were not as revolutionary as is generally thought. Walter Pillsbury (1911) had published a textbook in 1911 in which he had defined psychology as "the science of human behavior" (1) and added: "man may be treated as objectively as any physical phenomena" (4). As early as 1904, James McKeen Cattell (1904) had written: "the rather widespread notion that there is no psychology apart from introspection is refuted by the brute argument of accomplished fact" (176). Articles that were critical of introspection had also appeared (e.g., Dodge 1912; Dunlap 1912). Indeed, the only important contemporary of Watson in the United States who was still advocating the use of introspection was Titchener and he is the only psychologist who is mentioned in this connection by name. Watson was merely giving voice to a trend that had already occurred in American psychology, not outlining changes that still needed to be made.

It is important to remember that behaviorism was popular only in the United States. This point is often overlooked because of an unfortunate but widespread tendency to confuse the history of psychology in the United States with the history of psychology in general (Brock 2006). George Miller (2003) has written:

Behaviorism flourished primarily in the US and the cognitive revolution in psychology re-opened communication with some distinguished psychologists abroad. In Cambridge, UK, Sir Frederic Bartlett's work on memory and thinking had remained unaffected by behaviorism. In Geneva, Piaget's insights into the minds of children had inspired a small army of followers. And in Moscow, A. R. Luria was one of the first to see the brain and mind as a whole. None of these three spent time at the Center but we knew their work well. Whenever we doubted ourselves we thought of such people and took courage from their accomplishments. (142)

There has been a great deal of discussion over whether the transition from behaviorism to cognitivism in American psychology is best portrayed as "revolution" or "evolution" (e.g., Leahey 1992) but it was a non-event from a European perspective because psychology there had never gone behaviorist in the first place. One only need look at the kind of psychology that European refugees brought to the United States

with them in the 1930s. Gestalt psychology, for example, did not reject the study of conscious experience and placed great emphasis on it. It is because of this difference that the work of figures like Piaget and Vygotsky from the 1920s and 1930s was belatedly discovered by American psychologists in the 1960s.

If we are going to find an adequate explanation for the rise of behaviorism in the United States, we need to look at social factors that were operating in the United States. It was primarily in the United States that the so-called “applied” fields of psychology—clinical psychology, educational psychology, industrial psychology, consumer psychology, forensic psychology, etc.—began to emerge. The main reason for this is that American psychologists were more reliant than their European counterparts on private sources of support. Educational administrators, industrialists, advertisers, law enforcement agencies, the military, etc., were unlikely to provide funds for psychological research unless it resulted in knowledge that was relevant to their interests. It is this more than anything else that explains the rise of behaviorism in the United States. There is an important passage in Watson’s behaviorist manifesto that is often overlooked. He writes:

If psychology would follow the plan I suggest, the educator, the physician, the jurist and the businessman could utilise our data in a practical way, as soon as we are able, experimentally, to obtain them. Those who have occasion to apply psychological principles practically would find no need to complain as they do at the present time. Ask any physician or jurist today whether scientific psychology plays a practical part in his daily routine and you will hear him deny that the psychology of the laboratories finds a place in the scheme of work. I think the criticism is extremely just. One of the earliest conditions which made me dissatisfied with psychology was the feeling that there was no realm of application of the principles which were being worked out in content terms. (168–69)

He continues:

What gives me hope that the behaviorist position is a defensible one is the fact that those branches of psychology which have already partially withdrawn from the parent, experimental psychology, and which are consequently less dependent upon introspection are to-day in a most flourishing presentation. Experimental pedagogy, the psychology of drugs, the psychology of advertising, legal psychology, the psychology of tests, and psychopathology are all vigorous growths. (169)

The amount of space that Watson devotes to this issue stands in sharp contrast to his brief mention of the imageless thought controversy in a footnote.

It must be acknowledged here that Watson was onto something important. The social agencies that fund psychological research are not particularly interested in the content of people's minds. Some years ago, the former US President, Jimmy Carter was asked if he had ever committed adultery. He replied that he had committed adultery "in his heart." The statement resulted in amusement because our views on morality are generally concerned with behavior rather than thoughts. I can covet my neighbor's Mercedes Benz but I am not committing a crime unless I damage or steal it. It is only then that the law enforcement agencies will get involved. The same is true of other agencies in society that are concerned with the management of people. For example, children become a problem in schools when they misbehave, not when they have deviant thoughts. A similar situation pertains to advertisers. They might want people to remember the names of their products but the advertising will not be considered successful unless it leads people to buy their products. What all these agencies have in common is an interest in human behavior and Watson was correct in asserting that psychology would flourish if this was to become its main concern.

This is not to say that introspection is not without its practical uses. Kroker (2003) writes about a former student of Titchener who used introspection as a relaxation technique. The point remains, however, that the social agencies that are likely to fund psychological research are interested primarily in behavior and so this is the side of psychology's bread on which the butter is likely to be found. It also does not help that many of these social agencies are concerned with groups such as children and the mentally ill where introspection is impossible or unreliable. It was possible for someone like Titchener to pursue this kind of psychology from his tenured position at Cornell but many of his contemporaries did not have the luxury of investigating topics that were unlikely to lead to practical results. This situation did not apply in Europe or it applied to a lesser extent. For example, in Germany, psychology continued to be a branch of philosophy until World War II (Danziger 1979b).

The Persistence of Introspection

The ban on introspection is better seen as a social taboo rather than a rational response to a crisis. This may explain why introspection as a

practice never died out. It is often written that introspection survived under the guise of “verbal report” but there is an important difference between the two. The latter is akin to witness testimony; that is, something we are unlikely to accept without corroborating evidence of another kind. It did continue, however, in psychophysics, Gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis, and other forms of clinical practice. One has to be careful in using the term “introspection” because of the sloppy way in which it has been traditionally applied. I am using it here in the sense of examining subjective experience.

It would also explain why there have always been dissenting voices. Titchener was not convinced by Watson’s arguments and there was a series of polemics between the two. According to Titchener (1914), behaviorism was not science but technology. Other dissenting voices have appeared in the literature over the years. For example, David Bakan (1954) published an article with the title “A reconsideration of the problem of introspection” in 1954. Arguments in favor of introspection were made by Cyril Burt and by R. B. Joynson in British journals (Burt 1962; Joynson 1974). There were also articles in favor of introspection in the *American Psychologist*, such as “Reflections on introspection” by John Radford (1974) and “Behaviorism and the mind: A (limited) call for a return to introspection” by David Lieberman (1979). It is interesting to note that, although both these articles appeared in the *American Psychologist*, their authors were British. It seems that introspection has continued to be a British obsession. Further evidence of this can be seen from the fact that the British Psychological Society has a section devoted to “Consciousness and Experiential Psychology,” something that the American Psychological Association does not have.

This situation may change in the future. It seems that consciousness has started to make a comeback in psychology. There are now journals such as *Consciousness and Cognition*, which devoted a special issue to the topic of introspection in 2006 (Overgaard 2006), as well as the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. The rise of consciousness as an object of investigation in psychology will inevitably lead to the mythical account of the history of introspection being increasingly challenged. For the moment, it continues to survive.

Why the Mythical Account Survives

Psychologists with little experience of the history of psychology might think that once a mythical account has been exposed by scholarly

research, it is unlikely to survive. Nothing could be further from the truth. Part of the problem here is the unusual status of history of psychology with regard to the discipline as a whole. We can broadly classify the various specialities in psychology into two types; fields like social or developmental psychology that are considered to be central to the discipline and fields that are relatively peripheral, such as community or cross-cultural psychology. History of psychology does not fall neatly into either of these categories. Courses on the history of psychology are regularly offered in departments of psychology but it is relatively peripheral as an area of research (Brock 1998).

A consequence of this situation is that the courses are rarely taught by psychologists whose main area of specialization is the history of psychology and this is even true of the authors of some of the popular textbooks in the field. While they may pay lip-service to original sources and to the professional literature in their reference lists, their knowledge of the subject is largely derived from other textbooks. "Textbook history," which is generally the only kind of history to which psychologists are exposed, is often a culture unto itself. This is why textbooks continue to appear in which Wundt is described as an "introspectionist," in spite of the fact that some of the scholarly work on this subject is now over thirty years old (e.g., Danziger 1980; see also Brock 1993).

In some respects, history of psychology has suffered the same fate as introspection in that it has been neglected because it does not produce the kind of knowledge that is likely to appeal to psychology's paymasters. There is, however, a certain logic to this situation as well. In a well-known article titled, "Should the history of science be rated 'X,'" Brush (1974) suggests that the main purpose of offering courses on the history of science to science students is to socialize them into the ways of their discipline. He also suggests that scholarly historical accounts are not particularly useful in this regard and that myths can perform the task much better. Further evidence for this view can be found in the anthropological literature on myth. While writing my master's thesis on the "imageless thought" controversy many years ago, I came across the work of Malinowski (1926) on this subject. He noted that myths were always connected to particular social rules. They generally provided an account of the origins of a rule and the rationale for it. In this respect, it is misleading to understand the term, "myth" in the pejorative sense of something false. It is certainly that but it has a sociological dimension to it as well. In the case of the mythical account

of the history of introspection, it explains the origins of the rule that “psychologists study behavior” and warns of dire consequences if the rule is not observed. It is the persistence of the rule that explains the persistence of the myth. Should the day come when psychologists abandon this rule, the mythical account will have outlived its usefulness and can be given a well-earned retirement.

Conclusions

Brush’s juxtaposition of “history” and “myth” points to the more subversive aspects of history. If myth helps to reinforce a social rule, then exposing it as myth can help to undermine the rule. No doubt the advocates of a return to introspection will welcome the news that the traditional view of these events is a mythical account, if they were not aware of it already. It should be noted, however, that the rise of behaviorism in the United States did not occur for no reason. Watson’s claim that introspection will lead to unresolvable controversies may be without substance but the same thing cannot be said of his claim that the social agencies that provide support for psychology are primarily interested in the behavior of people, not the content of their minds. This problem will not be easily overcome.

It was not my intention in this chapter to provide support for the view that consciousness is a proper object of psychological investigation or that introspection is a useful method in this task. One of the points that was instilled into me during my initial training as a historian of science was: “it is not the job of a historian to tell scientists how they should do their work.” This seemed like a reasonable piece of advice and it is one that I have tried to follow ever since. History that is written with the aim of advocating a particular approach to psychology is usually considered to be bad history. At the very least, it ceases to be “history” in the usual sense of the term and becomes something else. A wise historian of economics once wrote in a different context:

I conclude that both critics and defenders . . . could improve upon their arguments through knowledge of the episode in intellectual history that has been recounted here. This is probably all one can ask of history, and of the history of ideas in particular: not to resolve issues, but to raise the level of the debate. (Hirschmann 1977, 135)

In recounting this particular episode in intellectual history, I have tried to do the same.

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