

# Psychology with your coffee?

This is a coffee-table book by the distinguished American historian of psychology, Wade Pickren. Pickren is, among other things, a former historian and archivist of the American Psychological Association, a former president of its history of psychology and general psychology divisions and the current editor of the journal *History of Psychology*. He is also the co-author of a widely used textbook on the history of psychology, as well as the author of several other contributions to the field. As might be expected from the author's background, the book takes a historical approach and is centred on 250 'milestones' in the history of psychology. That may not be such a bad thing. There is a widely held view to the effect that in order to understand a subject, we need to become acquainted with its history.

The word *psychology* is interpreted in a liberal way, and the book includes topics like Shamanism, Buddha's Four Noble Truths and the Bhagavad Gita. It also includes topics like Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Cultural Relativism and the BRAIN initiative that are usually associated with other disciplines but of relevance to psychology. However, most of the entries belong unambiguously to psychology. The book has a foreword by the person responsible for one of the milestones, Philip Zimbardo, who conducted the famous Stanford Prison Experiment over 40 years ago. Other examples are Learned Helplessness, Obedience and Positive Psychology.

Some of the entries reflect the interests of the author. Pickren is unusual among American psychologists in advocating an international approach to psychology, and this is reflected in entries like *Modern Psychology in India*, *Sikolohiyang Pilipino [Philippine Psychology]* and *Latin American Liberation Psychology*. Having said that, most of the entries involve developments in the United States. This is to some extent understandable, given the prominent role that American psychology has played in

the history of the field. Pickren also has an interest in disadvantaged groups, and this is reflected in the entries on *Black Psychology*, how homosexuality ceased to be regarded as a mental illness, and women and gender, such as *The Feminine Mystique* and *Gender Identity*. The entries are given in chronological order, even though the author recognises that it is difficult to put a precise date on some of them. As might be expected from the genre, the book is lavishly illustrated with photographs, diagrams and reproductions of posters, book pages, sketches, engravings and paintings. The paintings in particular make the book a pleasure to read.

The book is aimed at the general reader, and it should help to correct some of the popular misunderstandings of psychology that exist. It could also be a useful teaching resource, most obviously in introductory psychology and history of psychology courses but also in other courses. It contains accessible introductions to topics that are usually covered in courses on areas such as neuropsychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology and social psychology. The cross-references at the end of each entry and the section titled 'Notes and Further Reading' at the end of the book are particularly useful resources.

Finally, I was surprised to see that, in spite of having been a student and teacher of psychology for over 30 years, there was much in the book that was new to me. The sheer quantity of literature on psychology that is published makes it difficult for us to keep up with the literature outside our own specialities. The book will enable more experienced psychologists to reconnect with the discipline as a whole. It is a book that every library should have.

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Reviewed by Adrian C. Brock who is an independent scholar based in Greater Manchester



## Heard the one about...?

Ha! The Science of When We Laugh and Why  
Scott Weems

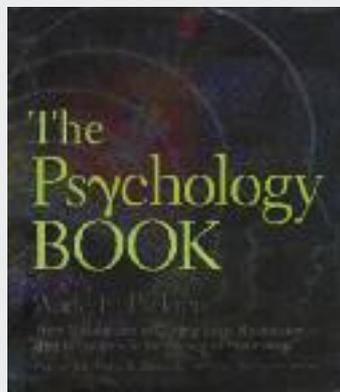
American cognitive neuroscientist Dr Scott Weems aims to define the nature and purpose of humour and laughter in this new book. Split into three core parts, he seeks to answer three key questions: 'What is humour?', 'What is it for?' and finally 'So what?' – why do we care about humour anyway? Weems shows how complexities of the human brain make humour possible and how it can affect our health and social well-being in many ways.

This is definitely not a self-help guide to make you funnier! Weems draws on a range of research, comedian anecdotes and personal experiences to uncover the functions and history of humour. Highlights include discussion of different styles of laughter and humour, methods of humour experimentation and cultural differences in humour perception. Drawing on his neuroscience background, Weems also clearly and concisely introduces the importance of dopamine and the dopamine reward circuit in humour perception. Alongside cognitive and social psychology research, this book does provide an accessible overview to the complexities of humour, its causes and origins.

True to the topic, this book is written with tales, jokes and puns aplenty, whilst maintaining a firm overview of scientific literature. The book in fact culminates in Weems taking to the stage himself as a comic for an evening: honestly admitting to 'bombing' and seeking audience critique of his failings. It seems that absorbing scientific literature alone doesn't make the comic! A well-researched and interesting read; this will definitely be of interest to any pop-science reader or indeed anyone with a sense of humour!

| Basic Books; 2014; Hb £17.99

Reviewed by Emma Norris who is a PhD student at University College London and Associate Editor for 'Reviews'



The Psychology Book  
Wade E. Pickren