
Editor's Note

The material in square brackets was added by Marie La Palme Reyes, Gonzalo Reyes, and Albert Bregman at places where some early readers had found the original manuscript to be unclear. Geert-Jan Boudewijnse checked over and completed the bibliographies. A note by John M. O'Donnell, S.J., was added to chapter 7 in response to criticisms that the author's drawing implications about the human mind from the Bible were unjustified from a strict scholarly reading and that his inferences were an attempt to reconcile his Catholicism with his views of the human mind. O'Donnell argues that the author's arguments derive from his reading of the Bible from the perspective of the Catholic tradition as a whole, and not from the bare words of the Bible.

Preface

This book is for people who would like to explore what the history of ideas has to offer us today in our attempts to understand the human mind. I wrote it in the first instance for psychologists, believing that many among them would welcome a closer look than they are usually offered at the psychologists of earlier ages and their relevance for current theory building. One aim, in which I take a particular delight, is to show that the major writings on the mind over the past two thousand years are not museum pieces; they are often as rewarding as the very best to be found among the contemporary books and journal articles that clamor ever so much more loudly for attention.

Our eyes, however, will never be exclusively on the past. Like motorists, we keep one eye on the rearview mirror for the purpose of guiding our progress. The contemporary scene is ever present in our reflections, and historical texts are made to yield morals, cautionary observations, and inspiration for present-day psychologists. Some rearview mirrors bear the inscription that objects seen in the mirror are closer than they appear. I would claim that the same applies to the figures seen in this book.

I also believe that there is a broader audience for a book such as this among people who are interested in the history of science and of ideas or who, like me, are simply fascinated by the human mind and its operations. I do not presuppose on the part of readers prior familiarity with the authors discussed, with the issues singled out for examination in their writings, or with contemporary treatment of those issues. The book is intended as a first introduction to historical reflections on contemporary

psychology. It is self-contained—in all but one sense. The qualification is prompted by the hope that readers, at least sometimes, will succumb to the temptation to turn to the writers themselves for a fuller understanding of the matters raised. To encourage this I attach to each chapter an indication of the most relevant passages in the author I have been discussing. Occasionally I add one or two particularly pertinent secondary sources, but in general I ignore such sources, which by their sheer bulk and number all too easily overwhelm beginners and obscure their view of the originals.

The book has its immediate origin in an undergraduate course that I have been giving at McGill University for just under a decade. Its roots go back much further. Even during the 1950s as a young high-school teacher in the outskirts of Dublin, I rode my bicycle the five miles into town to buy each issue of the Penguin series on the philosophers as it appeared: Berkeley, Kant, Leibniz, and so on. Each cost the equivalent of about 50 cents. As I became less straightened for funds, I began a life-long collection of the original writings of these authors, often but not always in cheap editions or second hand. Over the years I have come to see them as colleagues who puzzled over the same issues as we do. Very often something I was doing myself or something that a friend was working on was the key to understanding an important historical line of thought. Sometimes it was the other way about. A historical insight was the key to a contemporary puzzle. For me there has been a dialectic between the contemporary and the historical to which I want now to give a more definite shape. The large secondary literature on each of the writers we will encounter is, nearly always, written by scholars whose basic interests are remote from those of present-day experimental psychologists. There is also a place for a study of the historical figures as seen through the eyes of a contemporary experimentalist/theorist.

Not that I will offer unusual or novel interpretations of historical figures. Nothing could be further from my mind. With one exception, I will propose the standard interpretation of each author, precisely because it was that understanding that had an impact on theories of the human mind. Any originality there may be in the book is in the contact made with the experimental psychology of our own day and in the manner of evaluating a historical text. The one exception is in the chapter on gestalt

psychology, because I believe that an essential element in the seminal work of the founder of gestalt psychology, Christian von Ehrenfels, has been overlooked.

I chose the authors, and I chose the issues to study in their writings. It is inevitable that there should be a subjective element in the choice. I have written only of figures that I felt I had come to know well enough to be able to relate them to contemporary work. And yet I hope that historians of ideas as well as contemporary psychologists who go through the book will agree on the importance of each of the figures chosen and each of the issues raised in their work. Disagreement is more likely to focus on omissions, and often I might well agree. I want it to be perfectly clear at the outset, however, that I am not attempting to write a comprehensive textbook on the history of psychology or a comprehensive history of any of the figures or movements I write about. Choice of a writer or issue indicates that I thought them illuminating for contemporary psychology; omission of a writer or issue does not mean I thought them unimportant. Limits were placed by the fact that the course was a single semester one: two lectures a week for twelve or thirteen weeks. There were also the limitations of my knowledge.

The book ends with two rather different, though contemporaneous, movements that began in the early years of this century: the behaviorist movement of John B. Watson and the gestalt movement of Max Wertheimer. After them it is more difficult to claim that some figure or movement is historical. Later figures seem rather to be part of the contemporary scene.

The book exclusively covers psychology in what is called the "West." It neglects Muslim thinkers who were influential on the development of medieval theories of the mind. These Muslim thinkers include in their number the Sufi mystics, but alas I did not feel I knew enough to say anything insightful about them. The same applies to the whole world of Buddhism, of which there are several forms. These movements did not greatly influence the development of contemporary Western psychology, which is not to say that the study of Sufi or Buddhist theories of the mind would be unrewarding for Western psychologists.

We have, then, 25 reflections on Western writers. There is a danger that so many lectures on as many great thinkers will be fragmentary and