A History of

MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

FIFTH EDITION

C. JAMES GOODWIN

WILEY

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A HISTORY OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

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WILEY

To Susan

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PREFACE

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

As you already know if you have taught the history of psychology course, it can be a tough sell. Students often come into the course with firm and long-standing negative preconceptions about studying history, prepared to agree that history is "just one d——d thing after another," as someone once said. And when they discover the last name of psychology's premier historian, E. G. Boring, they may nod their heads knowingly. This attitude is unfortunate, of course, because I can think of no more fascinating subject than the history of psychology. It is replete with extraordinary persons and events, and it yields insights into the basic questions still being asked in psychology today. More than any other course in the psychology curriculum, the history course gives students an overall perspective on their chosen field of study.

No one can be an informed psychologist without having some knowledge of the discipline's history. Our task as instructors is to show students how valuable a knowledge of psychology's history can be, help them connect psychology's present with its rich past, and get them to understand how exciting the journey from past to present has been. I hope that my textbook will aid in this process.

The book is titled a history of *modern* psychology, reflecting the decision about where to begin the course that faces everyone who teaches it. Psychology has deep roots in Western philosophical thought; hence, a full understanding of important and recurring themes requires some understanding of this heritage. Texts, however, differ in the depth of coverage given to our philosophical ancestors, tending to fall into two groups. Some books invest considerable effort in exploring philosophical issues and provide in-depth coverage dating back to the ancient Greeks. This certainly is a legitimate strategy, but not the one I have chosen to follow. Instead, my text belongs in the second grouping—that is, although not by any means ignoring philosophical roots, it devotes less space to them and more space to the recent history of psychology, especially that of the past 150 years. Like other "modern" histories of psychology, its treatment of philosophy will begin in the vicinity of Descartes and the British empiricists.

The decision about a starting point is partly pragmatic—it has been my long experience as a teacher of this course, which has to fit typically into a 15-week semester, that extensive treatment of philosophical thought between the time of the Greeks and Descartes makes it impossible to get very far into the 20th century ("It's December and we've just started Watson!"). I always remind myself that the course is not just a history or a philosophy course, but part of the psychology curriculum, and that if I want students to make meaningful connections between my course and their other psychology classes, an important goal for me, it is necessary to get to the 19th and 20th centuries as quickly as possible. The history course must teach students about the ideas and research of pioneer psychologists, especially those who worked within the past 150 years or so. Students have heard about some of these people in other courses (e.g., Hall in adolescent psychology, Watson in the learning course, Freud in personality, Binet in tests and measurements, Münsterberg in industrial/organizational psychology). The history course serves to build on that rudimentary knowledge and interconnect it.

As for the book's organizational structure, each chapter begins with a *Preview* and a set of *Chapter Objectives*, which set the stage for what is to come, and ends with a *Summary* of the chapter's contents. Each chapter also opens with a carefully selected quote that is also worked into the narrative at some point in the chapter. Words printed in boldface in each chapter are defined at that point in the chapter and in a Glossary found after the References. To enable the student to make some connections between psychology and the rest of the world, timelines are included at the end of the book after the index.

A password-protected online Instructor Companion Site includes

- A variety of assignments that I have developed over the years, as well as other assignments and activities culled from the journal *Teaching of Psychology*.
- A set of resources to help with lecture preparation; these resources include an annotated list of articles and books that undergraduates will find readable and can be used for a variety of course assignments.
- A Test Bank that includes multiple-choice, short answer, matching, short essay, and comprehensive essay questions.

To reach these resources, go to www.wiley.com/college/goodwin, and select "Instructor Companion Site."

New to the Fifth Edition

- The overall organization of the book remains about the same as in the fourth edition. I have worked through every line of the book, clarifying points that appeared unclear and elaborating when necessary. The file that I keep as I go along, which documents specific changes from the prior edition, runs close to eight pages (contact me at jgoodwin@wcu.edu, and I would be glad to send you a copy).
- I have tried to keep up with scholarship in the history of psychology, and that is reflected in a net increase of about 50 references in this edition.
- Although I have maintained a fair amount of biographical information because it adds interest and helps situate historical characters in their times and places, I have reduced this information somewhat and replaced the space with more information on psychology's important concepts, research, and theories.
- There is a new type of boxed insert, *From the Miles Papers …* , which appears in 9 of the 15 chapters. These involve excerpts taken from documents in the Walter Miles papers, included to add depth to chapter topics and to give students some insight into the kind of material likely to be found in archival collections.
- Coverage of the following topics has been added or elaborated from prior editions: Triplett's study as origin myth, E. W. Scripture's postacademic life, Thomas Willis and brain anatomy, Luigi Galvani's research on electricity, the psychograph, the work of Johann Herbart, apperceptive mass, origins of stylus mazes, the Baldwin effect, the 1928 Carlisle conference, applying reaction time to football, European psychotechnics, the Nazi threat to Jewish researchers, Ivan Pavlov's lab as factory, the 1929 Yale conference, E. R. Guthrie's learning theory, medical approaches to

mental illness (fever therapy, insulin coma therapy, metrazol shock therapy, ECT), shell shock and its treatment in England, Morris Viteles and his work in industrial psychology, Stanley Milgram's obedience research, and Henry Murray's personology.

TO THE STUDENT

One of the primary themes of this book is that understanding the present requires knowing the past. You know something about psychology's present state by virtue of the other psychology courses you have taken, but you are probably not aware of the many interconnections that exist among the different areas of psychology you have studied. One goal of a history of psychology course is to make those connections. For example, although I am sure that you know something about the nature–nurture issue, you probably are not knowledgeable about how our current understanding of it has been affected by Darwinian theory, by the search for tests of mental ability, and by the behavior of rats in mazes. I hope these connections, as well as many others, will be obvious to you after you have finished the course.

You are about to meet some fascinating individuals who helped shape the psychology that you have been studying in other courses. Although we tend to think of historical figures as being somehow remote and different from ordinary persons, I have tried to show that these individuals were real human beings, often struggling with the kinds of problems that affect the rest of us. In the pages that follow, you will be meeting some people whose efforts led to some extraordinary accomplishments, but who also dealt with some of the same issues that may be of concern to you. For example,

- Are you tired of school and ready to get out into the "real" world and learn things on your own?
  Read about René Descartes (Chapter 2).
- Are you fed up with the way things are, wish you could change them, and willing to take on the status quo?
  Learn about John B. Watson (Chapter 10), B. F. Skinner (Chapter 11), or Dorothea Dix (Chapter 12).
- Are you faced with major decisions about your future and worried about taking a big career risk?
  Refer to the discussion about E. B. Titchener (Chapter 7) or Wolfgang Köhler (Chapter 9).
- Are you fascinated by research and enjoy collecting and analyzing data?
  See Hermann Ebbinghaus (Chapter 4), Ivan Pavlov (Chapter 10), or Leon Festinger (Chapter 14).
- Do you have a strong desire to help others?
  Read about Mary Cover Jones (Chapter 10), William Tuke (Chapter 12), or Carl Rogers (Chapter 13).
- Do you have a strong desire to achieve but face a stacked deck because of racism or sexism?
  Learn about the determination of Francis Sumner, Mary Calkins (both in Chapter 6), or Eleanor Gibson (Chapter 14).
- Are you a slow starter, not doing well in school, and wondering if you have a future?
  Study the early life of Wilhelm Wundt (Chapter 4), Charles Darwin (Chapter 5), or Donald Hebb (Chapter 14).

- Are you concerned that health problems or a physical handicap will make it difficult for you to reach your goals?
  Read about Lewis Terman (Chapter 8) or Clark Hull (Chapter 11).

I hope that you will enjoy reading this book, that you will learn something about psychology's present by learning about its past, and that you will gain some insight into human behavior in the process. At the end of the course, I hope that you will want to continue learning more about psychology's fascinating history.

To help you master the material in this text, I have prepared an online Study Guide. You can find it by going to www.wiley.com/college/goodwin, clicking on the book's image, and selecting "Student Companion Site" for this text. Among other things, it includes some practice tests that will help you ace the course.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCING PSYCHOLOGY'S HISTORY

History isn't just something that's behind us; it's also something that follows us.

—Henning Mankill, 2011

PREVIEW AND CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter opens by describing why it is important to know about psychology's history. A contrast is drawn between traditional histories of psychology, which emphasize the contributions of distinguished psychologists, the outcomes of famous experiments, and the debates among adherents of different "schools" of psychology, and a newer approach, which tries to situate events and people in a broader historical context. This chapter also considers the methods used by historians to conduct research in history and the problems they face when constructing historical narratives from available data. After you finish this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the events during the 1960s that led to a renewed interest in psychology's history among psychologists
- Explain why it is important for everyone to have some understanding of history
- Explain why it is especially important for psychology students to understand psychology's history
- Distinguish between "old" and "new" history, as Furumoto used the terms
- Understand the concept of an origin myth, and explain the purpose such myths serve
- Distinguish between presentist and historicist views of history, and articulate the dangers of presentist thinking
- Distinguish between internal and external histories of psychology, and describe the benefits of examining each
- Distinguish between personalistic and naturalistic approaches to history
- Define historiography and describe the various selection and interpretation problems faced by historians when they do their work
- Explain how the process of doing history can produce some degree of confidence that a measure of truth has been attained

WHY TAKE THIS COURSE?

Psychologists have always been interested in the history of their discipline. Histories of psychology were written soon after psychology itself appeared on the academic scene (e.g., Baldwin, 1913), and at least two of psychology's most famous books, E. G. Boring's *A History of Experimental Psychology* (1929; 1950) and Edna Heidbreder's *Seven Psychologies* (1933) are histories. It was during the 1960s, however, that significant interest in the history of psychology as a specialized area of research began. Many people were involved, but the major impetus came from a clinical psychologist with a passion for history, Robert I. Watson (1909–1980). He began with a call to arms, a 1960 *American Psychologist* article entitled "The History of Psychology: A Neglected Area" (Watson, 1960), in which he documented a paucity of articles about history in psychology journals and urged his colleagues to renew their interest in psychology's history. Watson then mobilized a small group of like-minded psychologists within the American Psychological Association into a "History of Psychology Group." By the end of the decade, this group had accomplished the sorts of things that mark the creation of a new specialized discipline—they formed professional organizations (e.g., Division 26 of the APA, otherwise known as the Society for the History of Psychology), they created journals (e.g., *The Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*), and they established institutional bases for the production of historical research (e.g., a graduate program at the University of New Hampshire; the Archives of the History of American Psychology at the University of Akron).

Today psychologists generally recognize the importance of knowing the history of their discipline, and a history of psychology course is offered in virtually all psychology departments and required for psychology majors in about half of those departments (Fuchs & Viney, 2002). Despite this consensus, students majoring in psychology are often surprised to find themselves in a course about the history of psychology. They check with their chemistry-major friends and find nothing comparable in that department. They examine the college catalog and discover that the closest course is one in the history of science, but the history department teaches it, not one of the science departments. What's going on? Why is there a history of psychology course taught by a psychologist, but not a history of chemistry course taught by a chemist?

The rationale for a history of psychology course is important, and will be considered shortly. First, however, let's examine the more general question of why it is important to study the history of anything. Is it true that "history is more or less bunk," as Henry Ford once said (quoted in Simonton, 1994, p. 3), or is it more likely, in the words of Swedish novelist Henning Mankill (2011), that "history isn't just something that's behind us; it's also something that follows us" (p. 220)?

Why Study History?

A typical answer to this question is that knowing history helps avoid the mistakes of the past and provides a guide to the future. These well-worn platitudes contain a germ of truth, but they are both simplistic. Concerning the "mistake" argument, rather than learning from the past, much of history appears to provide evidence that humans ignore the past. This possibility led the philosopher–historian G. W. F. Hegel to worry that the only true lesson of history is that people don't learn anything from history (Gilderhus, 2000). This almost certainly overstates the case, but it is also true that knowing the past provides, at best, only a rough guide, for history never really repeats itself because all events are tied into the unique historical context in which they occur. History is also a less than reliable guide

to the future. Historians recognize this—as psychology's eminent historian, E. G. Boring, once wrote, "The past is not a crystal ball . . . . The seats on the train of progress all face backwards: you can see the past but only guess about the future" (1963a, p. 5)—but the acknowledgment seldom prevents them from venturing forecasts.

If knowing history is won't prevent repeating mistakes, and if history is an imperfect (at best) means of forecasting the future, then what is left? *The present.* In the sentence immediately following the one I just quoted from Boring, he wrote: "Yet a knowledge of history, although it can never be complete and fails miserably to foretell the future, has a huge capacity for adding significance to the understanding of the present" (1963a, p. 5). I believe the single most important reason to study history is that the present cannot be understood without knowing something about the past—how the present came to be.

Think of any current event, and you will recognize that it is impossible to understand the event adequately without knowing some of the history leading to it. For example, consider some recent history within psychology. I am sure that you have heard about APA, the American Psychological Association. You might also know about or at least have heard of APS—the Association for Psychological Science.[1] You might even know that the APS is a fairly recent creature—it was born in 1988. Perhaps you also recognize that the APS seems more focused on scientific research than the APA, but you might be wondering why there need to be two organizations for psychologists. Knowing some history would help you understand this. Specifically, your understanding of why APS exists and its purpose would be vastly enhanced if you knew of the long-standing tensions between research psychologists and psychologists whose prime interest is in the professional practice of psychology (e.g., psychotherapy). The problem traces to APA's very beginnings in the late 19th century and contributed to the formation of a separate group of "Experimentalists" in 1904 (the story of this remarkable group is elaborated in Chapter 7). Also, when the APA was reorganized after World War II, the divisional structure that exists today was designed in part to reconcile the conflicting goals of scientists and practitioners. The goodwill that accompanied the end of the war led those with different interests in psychology to unite, but the unity didn't last long. After decades of frustration with APA, researchers formed their own group—APS. Without knowing something of this history, you could never have a clear understanding of the APS, why it exists today, or why there is lingering tension between APS leaders and the APA's governing structure. And there are practical consequences. As a student, if you have an interest in becoming a psychologist, you will probably want to join one of these organizations as a student affiliate. Deciding which to join requires knowing something of the history—someone aiming for a career in the professional practice of psychology might be more likely to join APA, but a future experimental psychologist might be better served by joining APS.

Another aspect of the importance of the past for understanding the present is that knowledge of history helps us put current events in a better perspective. For instance, we sometimes believe that our current times are, as Charles Dickens wrote, "the worst of times." We complain about the seemingly insurmountable problems and the ever-present dangers (e.g., from terrorism) that seem to accompany life in the early years of the 21st century. We long for the "good old days," a simpler time when nobody locked their doors and a good house could be ordered as a kit from Sears (this is true). We think that there really used to be places like Disney World's Main Street, USA. But knowing history is a good

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[1]In 2006, APS changed its name from the American Psychological Society to the Association for Psychological Science. The name change was designed to highlight the scientific focus of the organization, while at the same making it international in scope.

corrective here. Noted historian Daniel Boorstin, in an essay entitled "The Prison of the Present" (1971), described this fallacy:

> We sputter against the Polluted Environment—as if it had come with the age of the automobile. We compare our air not with the odor of horse dung and the plague of flies and the smells of garbage and human excrement which filled the cities of the past, but with the honeysuckle perfumes of some nonexistent City Beautiful. We forget that even if the water in many cities today is not spring-pure … , still for most of history the water of the cities (and of the countryside) was undrinkable. We reproach ourselves for the ills of disease and malnutrition, and forget that until recently, enteritis and measles and whooping cough, diphtheria and typhoid, were killing diseases of childhood, … [and] polio was a summer monster. (pp. 47–48)

Knowing history won't give us easy answers to current problems, but it certainly can immunize us against the belief that these problems are many times worse than they used to be. In fact, knowing the past can provide a comforting connection with it, and being aware of how others have wrestled with similar problems can provide us with some present-day guidance. There is at least the potential for learning from the past.

Besides making it possible for us to understand the present better, studying history provides other benefits. For example, it forces an attitude adjustment, keeping us humble in two ways. First, we occasionally delude ourselves into thinking we know a lot (especially true in my profession—university teaching). Studying history is a good antidote. For example, I grew up in southeastern New England, not far from Plymouth, and I thought I knew something about the Pilgrims. However, having read Nathaniel Philbrick's (2006) brilliant history of the Pilgrims, *Mayflower*, I am amazed by how little I knew—and by how much of what I thought I knew (e.g., about Thanksgiving) was dead wrong. Second, sometimes ignorance of the past can lead us to a kind of arrogance; we believe that the present is the culmination of centuries of progress and that modern-day accomplishments and thinking are more sophisticated and far surpass those of a crude and uninformed past. Knowing history, however, forces an understanding that each age has its own marvelous accomplishments and its own creative geniuses. Modern-day neuroscientists seem to make fascinating discoveries every day, but the importance of their discoveries and the quality of their scientific thinking do not surpass the elegance of Pierre Flourens's 19th-century investigations of the brain (Chapter 3), which disproved phrenology.

Finally, studying history ultimately means searching for answers to one of life's most fundamental yet perplexing questions: What does it mean to be human? To study the history of World War II is to delve into the basic nature of prejudice, aggression, and violence. To study the American Revolution is to examine the human desire for freedom and self-determination. To study the history of Renaissance art is to study the human passion for aesthetic pleasure. And to the extent that history involves people behaving in various situations, studying history means studying and trying to understand human behavior. For this reason alone, psychologists should be inherently attracted to the subject.

Why Study Psychology's History?

The preceding rationale for studying history is sufficient by itself to justify studying psychology's history, but there are additional reasons why psychologists should be interested in their ancestry. First, compared with other sciences, psychology is still in its infancy—not much more than 130 years old. Much of the content of the other psychology courses you have taken traces back through at least half of those years, and many of the so-called classic studies that you learned about (e.g., Pavlov's conditioning research) formed a major part of the first half of those years. Hence, modern psychology is closely tied to its past, so being a literate student of psychology requires knowing some history.

A second and related reason for an interest in psychology's history among psychologists is that the field is still grappling with many of the same topics that occupied it a century ago. Thus, an important issue today is the heritability of traits ranging from intelligence to shyness to schizophrenia. This nature–nurture issue, first popularized more than 140 years ago by Sir Francis Galton (Chapter 5) and pondered by humans for centuries, reverberates through the history of psychology. Seeing the parallels between the arguments made now about the interactive influence of heredity and environment, and comparing them with those made in earlier times, you will gain a more informed understanding of the issue.

Earlier, a question was raised about the presence of a history of psychology course and the absence of a history of chemistry course. Whereas an understanding of current research and related issues is essential in psychology, the situation is somewhat different in chemistry. Although the history of alchemy, with its stories of how people tried to transform lead into gold, is fascinating and can teach us a great deal about how science works and evolves, it doesn't inform today's students about the chemical properties of lead or of gold. Chemists, who tend to think (naively, as it happens) of their science as steadily progressing from the errors of the past to the truth of the present, aren't normally interested in cluttering their students' minds with "old" ideas. There is a small element of truth to this model of science as advancing through history (nobody tries to turn lead into gold anymore), but it is nonetheless unfortunate that many scientists don't see the value of studying the history of their discipline. At the very least, it would round out their education and teach them something about how scientific thinking has evolved. Indeed, there ought to be a history of chemistry course for chemistry students to take. Instead, they have to settle for a history of science course, typically taught in history rather than science departments. Psychology majors, on the other hand, are lucky—they get their own history course.

A third reason why the history of psychology course exists is that it can provide some unity for what has become a diverse and highly specialized field. Despite its youth, psychology in the early 21st century is notable for its lack of unity. Indeed, some observers (e.g., Koch, 1992a) have argued that a single field of psychology no longer exists, that a neuroscientist investigating the functioning of endorphins has virtually nothing in common with an industrial psychologist studying the effectiveness of various management styles. Yet all psychologists do have something in common—their history. For the psychology major who has taken a seemingly disconnected variety of courses ranging from developmental to abnormal to social psychology, the history course can serve as a synthesizing experience. By the time you reach the final chapter of this text, where the issue of psychology's increased specialization is again addressed, you will have learned enough to begin understanding the interconnectedness among the different areas of psychology.

Fourth, an understanding of psychology's history makes one a more critical thinker. By being aware of the history of various treatments for psychological disorders, for example, the discerning student is better able to evaluate modern claims for some "revolutionary breakthrough" in psychotherapy. A close examination of this allegedly unique therapy might reveal similarities to earlier approaches. The historically literate student also is aware that on many other occasions, initial excitement over a flashy new therapy (e.g., lobotomy) is tempered by a later failure to find convincing evidence that it works. Similarly, knowing history makes one skeptical about "large claims" (Helson, 1972), for example, the recent idea that all psychology can be known by understanding the brain and that neuropsychology, therefore, is the future of psychology. Those with an understanding of history will recognize the similarity to claims made in the 19th century about phrenology, will recognize that a brain scan showing activity in area X when a person is lying does not explain lying, and will understand why neuropsychology is sometimes referred to as the new phrenology (Satel & Lilienfeld, 2013).

Finally, the history of psychology course may be a history course, but it is also a psychology course. Thus, one of its goals is to continue educating about human behavior. Studying historical

individuals as they helped develop the science of psychology can only increase our understanding of what makes people behave the way they do. For instance, our understanding of scientific creativity can be enhanced by studying the lives and works of historically creative individuals (e.g., Hermann Ebbinghaus, described in Chapter 4, who created nonsense syllabus to study memory). Some insight into the psychology of controversy and the rigid, dogmatic adherence to one's beliefs can be gained by studying the behavior of scientists engaged in bitter debate with their peers (e.g., the Baldwin–Titchener controversy, described in Chapter 7). In general, if all human behavior reflects a complex interplay between individuals and the environments they inhabit, then studying the lives of historical characters being shaped by and in turn shaping their environments can only increase our understanding of the factors that affect human behavior.

KEY ISSUES IN PSYCHOLOGY'S HISTORY

A common misconception of history is that historians simply "find out what happened" and then write it down in chronological order. As you will learn in the next two sections of this chapter, the process is considerably more complicated. When they are engaged in their craft, historians are affected by several important issues. These were nicely articulated by Furumoto, in a 1989 article distinguishing between what she referred to as "old" and "new" history.

The old history of psychology, according to Furumoto (1989), emphasizes the accomplishments of "great" psychologists and celebrates "classic studies" and "breakthrough discoveries." Within psychology, the preservation and retelling of these "great events" helped psychology secure an identity as an established scientific discipline. The milestones, whether accurately described or not, are passed down from history text to history text. Furthermore, previous insights or achievements are valued only if they somehow "anticipated" or led to some modern idea or research outcome. Old research or theory that is of no current relevance is considered erroneous or quaint and is either discarded or seen as an example of "how far we've come." Thus, from the standpoint of old history, the purpose of the history of psychology is to legitimize and even to glorify present-day psychology and to show how it has progressed from the murky depths of its unscientific past to its modern scientific eminence.

One effect of the old history thinking about the past is the creation of so-called **origin myths**. These are stories overemphasizing the importance of particular events in psychology's history. Their purpose is to highlight the contrast between what is said to be a prescientific approach to some psychological phenomenon and the emergence of a more scientific strategy. For example, modern social psychologists consider their field to be one in which scientific methods are used to establish certain laws about human social behavior. Fair enough. Holding this belief, of course, raises the question of when social psychology became "experimental" (i.e., real science, and therefore "worthy"). That is, when did it originate? The further back in history this origin can be placed, the greater the legitimacy of an experimental social psychology ("Oh yes, we have been around for a very long time, using science to explore social behavior."). If experimental social psychology could be said to originate in the 19th century, for instance, then the social psychologist can claim well over 100 years of research, suggesting that modern social psychology is (a) well established and (b) has been accumulating an extraordinary amount of scientifically based knowledge over the years.

These concerns led Haines and Vaughan (1979) to ask whether 1898 was a "'great date' in the history of experimental social psychology" (p. 323). Their answer: not really. This conclusion probably came as a surprise to many social psychologists because 1898 was the publication date for what has become a famous study by Norman Triplett, who wondered why cyclists seem to go faster when they

race against others than when they ride alone. He created a simple apparatus that simulated racing and appeared to demonstrate that the presence of a competitor "facilitated" performance (Triplett, 1898). This is similar to a research phenomenon later called "social facilitation" and so, to social psychologists in the mid-20th century, Triplett's study seemed to be an early experimental demonstration of the phenomenon. Hence, some (e.g., G. Allport, 1954a) argued that Triplett was the founder of experimental social psychology, and the cycling study was the origin point. Now, the Triplett study was interesting one, but it is hard to justify it as the start of experimental social psychology. Triplett certainly did not think it originated anything like a new discipline—he was just interested in cycling. And a strong research tradition in social psychology did *not* begin to develop in the aftermath of the study, as one might expect if the Triplett study was a turning point. Deliberate efforts to make social psychology research based did not occur until the 1920s, with the work of Floyd Allport (1924), whose work is mentioned briefly in Chapter 14, and a significant push toward experimental research by social psychologists didn't occur until the work of Leon Festinger (also discussed in Chapter 14) in the 1950s. Yet modern social psychology texts still continue to trace the origins of experimental social psychology to Triplett, and the origin myth continues to be promoted.[2]

Old versus new approaches to psychology's history can be characterized in terms of three contrasts. Old history tends to be presentist, internal, and personalistic. New history, on the other hand, is more historicist, external, and naturalistic.

Presentism versus Historicism

Earlier, I argued that a major reason for studying history is to better understand what is happening in the present. This is indeed a valid argument. On the other hand, to interpret and assess the past *only* in terms of present understanding is to be guilty of **presentism**. In an editorial in the opening volume of the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, George Stocking (1965) contrasted presentism with an approach called **historicism**. As he described it, the presentist interprets historical events only with reference to modern knowledge and values, whereas the historicist tries to understand the same event in terms of the knowledge and values in existence at the time of the event. Because the historicist tries to place historical events within the overall context of their times, this approach is sometimes called a *contextual* approach to history. The danger of presentist thinking is that it misleads us into thinking that individuals in the past should have known better and that they ought to have foreseen what was coming. Consequently, we may be led to judge historical individuals more harshly than we ought to. "What were they thinking?" we say to ourselves.

To demonstrate the dangers of presentist thinking, consider some aspects of the history of intelligence testing. As you will learn in Chapter 8, in the years just before World War I, the American psychologist Henry Goddard was invited to Ellis Island in New York to help screen immigrants. Those deemed "unfit" for various reasons were returned to their country of origin. Goddard firmly believed that intelligence was an inherited trait and that it could be measured with a brand-new technology—something created in France and just beginning to be called an IQ test. Goddard used a version of this test to identify "feebleminded" immigrants, and his work contributed to the deportation of untold numbers of people. His conclusion that large percentages of immigrants were "morons" (a term he invented to describe

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[2]A close reading of the Triplett study shows that the "social facilitation" explanation oversimplifies what he apparently found (Stroebe, 2012). Thus, only about half of the subjects in his study performed better in competition than by themselves. The others were unaffected or even adversely affected. Furthermore, subsequent statistical analysis (not available to Triplett in 1898) questioned whether the study found any differences at all.

a subcategory of feeblemindedness) might have contributed to the atmosphere that led Congress to pass restrictive immigration quotas in the 1920s. From today's standpoint, on the basis of an additional 75 years or so of research, we know about the need for caution when using and interpreting IQ tests. Hence, we find it difficult to believe that someone as smart as Goddard could have behaved with such obvious bias. "What was he thinking?" we might ask ourselves. But to understand Goddard's behavior, it is necessary to study it from the vantage point of the historical period in which it occurred instead of that of today. This means knowing about such things as (a) the powerful influence of Darwinian thinking and Mendelian genetics on the psychological testers of that day, which led easily to a belief that intelligence was a trait that had been naturally selected and enabled a physically weak species (humans) to adapt to their environment during the "struggle for existence" and was therefore inherited; (b) the nation's fears of being overrun with immigrants (large-scale immigration was a fairly new phenomenon at that time); and (c) the assumption, not yet brought into question by such inventions as atomic bombs, that any new technology (e.g., IQ tests) with the "scientific" seal of approval meant "progress" and was therefore good. The list could be continued but the point is clear. Goddard's work cannot be fairly evaluated by what we know today; it can be understood only in the context of its times. On the other hand, his work does have relevance for us in the present. Knowing about it can (a) help us better understand modern concerns about immigration—it's not a new problem; (b) inform us of the subtle influence of racism and other forms of bigotry, even in intelligent people; and (c) make us properly cautious about the alleged wonders of new technologies that arrive in our own day. Furthermore, just because we attempt to understand Goddard within the context of his own time, this does not mean that we cannot judge his actions; but our criticisms should be made with some caution, taking the form of arguments that were also made by others during the period in question. Thus, although the past can help us understand the present, our knowledge about the present should not be used to judge the past.

The Goddard episode illustrates how difficult it is for us to avoid a presentist orientation (Hull, 1979). After all, we are the products of our own personal histories, and it is perhaps impossible to ask us to think like a person who never experienced the events of 9/11 or the impact of digital technology. Nonetheless, for the historian and the reader of history it is important to at least be aware of the dangers of a presentist view of history and to constantly seek to understand historical episodes on their own terms. One must recognize, as pointed out by historian Bernard Bailyn (Lathem, 1994), that "the past is not only distant, but different" (p. 53). He went on to write that the major obstacle in overcoming presentism (or "anachronism," as historians often call it) is the problem of "overcoming the knowledge of the outcome. This is one of the great impediments to a truly contextualized history" (p. 53). As to how we might go beyond our knowledge of outcomes and overcome presentist thinking, Bailyn had this suggestion:

> Somehow one has to recapture, and build into the story, contemporaries' ignorance of the future . . . . One … tries to avoid assigning the heroism or villainy that was unclear at the time but that was determined by later outcomes. And, if possible, one gives a sympathetic account of the losers. If one can, up to a certain point, work sympathetically with the losers, one can—in some small part at least—overcome the knowledge of the outcome. (pp. 53–54)

Let me close this section by giving you an example of presentist writing that I found while reading a biography of Sir Isaac Newton (White, 1997). Even good writers and historians can fall into the trap. One of Newton's strong avocations was alchemy, the quest to create gold from base metals. In describing the alchemy interests of one of Newton's predecessors, Paracelsus (famous in the history of medicine), the author wrote that "following many an alchemist in a stereotypical fixation with *finding the unattainable and achieving the impossible*, [Paracelsus] traveled Europe in search of the secrets of

the ancients, squandering much of his talent and any money he earned along the way" (p. 120; emphasis added). This is a good example of writing from the standpoint of knowing the outcome (alchemy failed), while ignoring the importance of alchemy to the history of science and the historical context that made alchemy a respected endeavor for a time.

Internal versus External History

Histories of psychology are often written by psychologists who wish to trace the development of the theories and research traditions held by various psychologists. This kind of approach is referred to as an **internal history**—what is written occurs entirely within ("internal to") the discipline of psychology. Such an approach has the value of providing detailed descriptions of the evolution of theory and research, but it ignores those influences outside psychology that also influence the discipline. An **external history** considers those outside influences.

Internal histories are often referred to as histories of ideas. Typically, they are written by people trained in the specific discipline being analyzed, and they tend to be written by people with little or no expertise in history per se. They are inward looking, focusing on the development of ideas or the progression of research to the exclusion of the larger world. On the other hand, external histories take the broader view—they examine societal, economic, institutional, and extradisciplinary influences. An exclusively internal history is narrow and loses the richness of historical context, whereas an excessively external history can fail to convey an adequate understanding of the ideas and contributions of a discipline's key figures. A balance is needed.

The interplay between internal and external history is demonstrated nicely in the history of cognitive psychology, the study of such phenomena as attention, memory, language, and thinking. The story of cognitive psychology is told in Chapter 14, but for now a sketch of it provides a nice contrast between internal and external history. From the standpoint of internal history, cognitive psychology's rise in the United States is often seen in relation to the decline of behaviorism. Behaviorism was a force in American psychology throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and well into the 1950s. Part of its attraction was its seeming ability to explain, by means of conditioning principles, all that was important about behavior. Humans were a product of their conditioning history, so the argument went. One problem, however, became increasingly clear in the 1950s: Behaviorist accounts of human language were inadequate. The nature of language and the learning of language by children seemed to be inconsistent with conditioning principles. That is, *within psychology*, a shift began to occur from a behaviorist paradigm to one that emphasized cognitive factors.

External to psychology, there were several other forces at work that helped bring about what some called a cognitive revolution. First, it is no coincidence that interest in cognitive psychology occurred in parallel with the growth and development of computer science because psychologists began to see the computer as an interesting metaphor for the human brain. In both cases, information was taken in from the environment, "processed" in various ways internally, and then put in the form of some output. In memory research, for example, diagrams of memory processes looked just like computer flowcharts, tracking the flow of information through a system. Second, the momentum for a shift from behaviorist to cognitive models grew significantly in the 1960s, a decade of great disruption and change in American society. The cultural climate embodied by the phrase "change is the only constant" made it easier for psychologists to embrace change within their discipline. In sum, then, understanding the development of cognitive psychology requires knowing not just about the difficulties encountered by behaviorism (e.g., language) but also about developments in the wider world (computer science, the '60s).