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THE MIND OF A NATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CRITIQUE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology at Massey University

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Dedicated to all those, past and present, who have made psychology what it is today in New Zealand
Abstract

In this thesis the development of the discipline of academic psychology in New Zealand is explored both as a history and as an intellectual framework. The key tasks of this thesis are outlined, and the problems associated with writing a history are discussed. The methodology is explained as consisting of archival research, surveying and face-to-face interviewing. There follows an examination of the intellectual development of psychology, from the time of the Ancient Greeks to the present day, where the analytical focus is the fundamental dichotomy of mind-body and, as a subset, human consciousness. This focus is important to this thesis because the researcher regards consciousness as the major variable in the evolution of psychology. Chapter three deals more specifically with the mind-body issue and consciousness, and provides an intellectual framework within which the historical developments of psychology on these shores can be considered. Chapter four deals with academic psychology in New Zealand, from its earliest times when Otago University was founded, where it was taught as a subset of philosophy, to the point at which psychology gained autonomy as an independent discipline. This exposition includes the creation and development of the University of New Zealand. In this chapter, it is shown that while psychology was first taught at Otago in 1875, it gained its freedom last of all at that university. Other factors highlighted in this chapter include the involvement of the Presbyterian Church in the development of philosophy (hence psychology) at Otago, and the turbulence of those early years there, where no less than eight professors of philosophy came and went, by comparison with only the one at Victoria College. Chapter five begins at the point at which psychology gained its independence from philosophy, which varied in time across the then four university colleges. The first department to break free was at Victoria College (1950) and the last, Otago (1964). The roles of key personalities are explored, where these are supplemented by extracts from personal interviews. The way in which courses and programmes within each department of psychology developed is also examined. In particular, the output of graduate theses (Doctoral and Masterate) are analysed, across the decades of existence of each department, in terms of subdisciplines and gender. Of interest is the finding of a marked gender reversal effect, which occurred around the late 1970s to the early 1980s, in which theses produced by female graduates outstripped those produced by males. This chapter also reports the findings of a survey of New Zealand psychology academics conducted by the researcher, using a mailed-out questionnaire. The findings include a participant profile and views on a variety of variables such as philosophical stance and theoretical orientation. The final chapter includes comparisons across the six...
university departments of psychology with attempts at explaining some of the key findings, a brief look at the non-university providers of psychology at the degree level, a consideration of some new directions for academic psychology in this country and, finally, a revisiting of the topic of consciousness which ran as a thread through the thesis.

Preface

My interest in the history, systems and theory of psychology is a long-standing one. At the root of this interest has been an even longer-standing interest and concern with the philosophical underpinnings of psychology, the mind-body issue in particular. From the beginnings of my own study of psychology, it has been my belief that an understanding of the origins of psychology, and an awareness of the way in which it has developed, are prerequisites to an understanding of the discipline, its theories and its practices. Having researched and written this thesis, I am now completely convinced of this.

When one looks back through the earlier New Zealand course structures in psychology prior, say, to the 1960s, one is struck by the importance placed by those early academics on the philosophy and history of psychology, where this was actively taught to their students. Although, as this thesis will show, the teaching of psychology within departments of philosophy had its negative features, a positive feature was a proper grounding in the theoretical and philosophical bases of the discipline. The situation today is very different, with few departments of psychology in New Zealand offering courses on the philosophy, history or systems of psychology. Even within specific graduate course topics, for example, social psychology or learning theory, one does not find much evidence of a critical exposition of origins, underpinning philosophy and historical developments.

While not offered as empirical support, my own experiences at Massey University as undergraduate then graduate student of psychology showed me that very few, if any, of my several student cohorts had any significant knowledge of the history of psychology, not even of its developments in this country. True, they could all trot out that Wilhelm Wundt was the Father of Psychology or, perhaps, supply some dates and theorists from their own
special area of interest. But few had any real grasp of, or even interest in, the formative centuries of psychology in Europe. None that I had discussions with had given any thought to the fact that psychology emerged from philosophy, and what this implied for psychology. While some undoubtedly had a better grasp than I of, say, behaviourist principles, none of these students knew or really cared about where this brand of thinking came from. Of those fellow graduate students who showed admirable levels of dedication to learning theory (and there were quite a few!), and knew all about Skinner, few had ever heard of Thorndike and his Law of Effect, and even fewer of the British Empiricists! The same was true of the major psychological paradigms, and their philosophical origins and allegiances. I would speculate that I would have found the same situation had I studied in any one of the other departments of psychology in this country.

I do not mean the above to be a criticism of my fellow students, nor of my university teachers. If, unlike me, these students did not possess this spirit of enquiry into the past before starting their studies, then little that they met with was going to encourage such a spirit. In the case of my teachers, there were indeed those who had an interest in and a deep knowledge of the origins and developments of psychology. However, they found too few students who wanted to learn of these things. The indictment is of this modern era in general, and of the academic system in particular, which has allowed itself to become conditioned by New Right thinking in terms of giving education a user-pays dynamic, and eschews anything that it is able to brand as being of no immediate value and not contributing significantly to the quota of students. Thus, unlike in the past, we have large numbers of psychology graduates going out into employment who have little understanding of their discipline. They have accepted a set of truths as givens, have had little opportunity to delve into the origins of these so-called truths, and have had virtually no exposure to the underlying philosophical assumptions of science per se.

One of the key functions played by the university system, aside from imparting specific knowledge sets, is to teach students critical thinking. This, when coupled with the other major role of the university as the critic (even conscience) of society, should leave a student in a powerful position to make deeply informed choices in all domains of their lives. My fear is that this is not the case with students of psychology. It is my hope that, what ever other contribution this thesis makes, it may reawaken an interest in the origins and
developments of psychology in general, and in New Zealand in particular, and lead to a rectification of the absence of courses, at least at the graduate level, on history, systems and theories in psychology.

Acknowledgments

I wish acknowledge the debt I owe to several people who were, in some way, involved in the production of this thesis. However, while they can all take credit for the support, help, guidance and encouragement they gave me, the responsibility for any errors or misguided views rest with me alone.

Firstly, I wish to thank Dr Ross St. George (ex Massey academic psychologist) for his initial enthusiasm for this project. Aside from being a fine teacher of psychology, Ross is a valued historian of the discipline. Special thanks go to Dr John Podd, my Chief Supervisor, whose critiques of my ever evolving drafts have been comprehensive and very timely. It has been a special thrill to work with John on this project. Thanks also to Dr Gus Habermann of Massey University, as my second supervisor, for the fascinating emails on consciousness, and the opportunities to publish.

Thanks also to the staff of Victoria University of Wellington Library for their help and patience. Many is the time they have had to come down to the basement and turn me out at closing time. Special thanks also to the Staff of the Archives Section of the Hocken Library of the University of Otago.

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Thanks must also go to those past and present senior academics who agreed to be interviewed by me. I look back on those interviews with a sense of privilege and pleasure. Thanks also to the psychology departments heads of Auckland, Canterbury, Massey, Otago, Victoria and Waikato for their permission to survey their staff.

My love and thanks to Miles, my teenage son, for his patience when there were other more important things to do and his dad was locked away in his study. Last, but most of all, my love and thanks to Kathy, my partner, for her encouragement and enthusiasm for this project, and for her valued suggestions and critiques. She kept me going through some dark hours and has read every single word of this rather lengthy thesis.
ERRATA

Page 24: line 23: The reference to Augustine should read (Augustine, 400/1912, 385-427/1948)

Page 74, paragraph 7: A footnote is required in relation to James, as follows:

1. Some argue that James used the term "dualism" in a purely intra-subjective sense – that of the dualism between the subjective "knower" and the subjective "known". However, in this sense we are all dualists, so little is added by this distinction. I argue that James was using the term in its Cartesian sense, of a dualism between the subjective knower (consciousness or mind) and the objective known (the world of his perceptions).

Page 131, Commentary on James' Principles: A footnote is required as follows:

1. Even though James has an entire chapter on the mind-body problem in "Principles", he argues that this problem is not the province of psychology, but that of metaphysics.


Page 173: There is a missing line after "Adcock was a pacifist..., as follows

....which made difficulties for him being twice in a war zone. He had stood with....

Page 201, lines 3-4: starting catch up should read, starting to catch up.

Page 233, line 5: the word three should read two (professors).

Page 254, line 18: in this line, shown should read shows.

Page 261, entry 11: The date should read (385-427/1948)

Page 261, entry 12: The date should read (400/1912)

Page 267, entry 8: Australsian should read Australasian
## CONTENTS

Abstract iii
Preface iv
Acknowledgements vi
List of Tables x
List of Figures x

### CHAPTER 1: WRITING A HISTORICAL CRITIQUE: THE FACTORS INVOLVED 1

- Introduction 1
- Some terminology 2
- Historiographical considerations 5
- Methodology 9

### Chapter 2: THE PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY 17

- The basic dichotomy 17
- The historical relationship between philosophy and psychology 19
  - Early Greek origins 19
  - the Romans 23
  - The Scholastics 26
  - The Renaissance 26
  - The Modern era 28
- The Early Psychologists 33
  - The Germanic influence 34
  - The beginnings of modern psychology 36

### Chapter 3: MIND AND CONSCIOUSNESS 47

- The mind-body problem 47
- Consciousness 58
- Psychology and consciousness 64

### Chapter 4: THE HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND PSYCHOLOGY -- PART I, THE EARLY DAYS 79

- Introduction 79
- The University of New Zealand 80
The early texts 86
University of Otago 91
Canterbury University College 107
Auckland University College 111
Victoria University College 113
Comparisons across the colleges 118
Commentary on these early years 121

Chapter 5: THE HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND PSYCHOLOGY
-- PART II: THE DAYS OF INDEPENDENCE 138

The separation of psychology from philosophy 139
University of Otago 141
University of Canterbury 150
The University of Auckland 163
Victoria University of Wellington 171
The prelude to the New Universities 180
Massey University 183
The University of Waikato 190
The subdisciplines and the gender reversal effect 199
Survey of New Zealand Psychologist Academics 203

Chapter 6: NEW ZEALAND PSYCHOLOGY:
AN OVERVIEW AND THE FUTURE 229

A retrospective and some conclusions 229
An overview of the developments of academic psychology in New Zealand 231
Some new directions in New Zealand academic psychology 233
Staff gender 239
Thesis production 241
The new providers of psychology at the tertiary level 248
The issue of consciousness in New Zealand psychology 252

Bibliography 261
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Key theorists on the topic of consciousness 65
Table 3.2: Consciousness: approaches and theorists across the decades 75
Table 4.1: The key psychology texts used by New Zealand university college departments teaching psychology during the founding years of psychology 88
Table 4.2: The relationship between given early psychology texts, the decade of their use and the four original university colleges 89
Table 4.3: The Professors of Philosophy of the University of Otago 106
Table 4.4: Professors of Philosophy-Psychology – comparisons across the four colleges with the dates of foundation and the first professor highlighted 119
Table 5.1: The separation of psychology from philosophy in the four original university colleges 140
Table 5.2: Description of subdisciplines used in categorising theses 147
Table 5.3: Numbers of theses produce by male and female Doctoral and Masters students in psychology across departments and across decades 200
Table 5.4: A comparison on orientation factors between Auckland and Waikato Universities 210
Table 6.1: PhD and Masterate theses produced by the six psychology departments in New Zealand universities 242
Table 6.2: PhD and Masters thesis output across subdisciplines and across departments 245

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1: The numbers of Masters and Doctoral theses per decade for Otago 145
Figure 5.2: Combined Doctoral and Masterate theses by gender across the decades 1930 to 1990 for Otago 146
Figure 5.3: The distribution of theses within the subdisciplines within psychology at Otago across the decades 1930 to 1990. See Table 5.2 below for a full description of each subdiscipline. 146
Figure 5.4: Results of thesis categories check using a rater 148
Figure 5.5: The numbers of Masters and Doctoral theses per decade for Canterbury 160
Figure 5.6: Combined Doctoral and Masterate theses by gender across the decades 1920 to 1990 for Canterbury 160
Figure 5.7: The distribution of theses within subdisciplines within psychology at Canterbury across the decades 1920 to 1990 161
Figure 5.8: The numbers of Masters and Doctoral theses per decade for Auckland 168
Figure 5.9: Combined Doctoral and Masterate theses in psychology by gender across the decades 1940 to 1990 for Auckland 169

Note: The list of figures continues on the next page
Figure 5.10: The distribution of theses within subdisciplines within psychology at Auckland across the decades 1940 to 1990
Figure 5.11: The numbers of Masters and Doctoral theses in psychology per decade for Victoria
Figure 5.12: Combined Doctoral and Masterate theses in psychology by gender across the decades 1940 to 1990 for Victoria
Figure 5.13: The distribution of theses within subdisciplines within psychology at Victoria across the decades 1940 to 1990
Figure 5.14: The numbers of Masters and Doctoral theses in psychology per decade for Massey
Figure 5.15: Combined Doctoral and Masterate theses by gender across the decades 1970 to 1990 for Massey
Figure 5.16: The distribution of theses within subdisciplines of psychology at Massey across the decades 1970 to 1990
Figure 5.17: The numbers of Masters and Doctoral theses in psychology per decade for Waikato
Figure 5.18: Combined Doctoral and Masterate theses in psychology by gender across the decades 1960 to 1990 for Waikato
Figure 5.19: The distribution of theses within subdisciplines within psychology at Waikato across the decades 1960 to 1990
Figure 5.20: Combined Doctoral and Masterate theses in psychology by gender across the decades 1950 to 1990 for Canterbury
Figure 5.21: Age distribution among surveyed academics in psychology departments in New Zealand universities
Figure 5.22: Distribution of time in years spent in an academic position at a New Zealand university