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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1998

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 pre-requisites 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.

My thanks go to The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, my employer, for all the support and encouragement is has given me. Special thanks go to Paul Sutcliffe, HoS of the School of Management at the Open Polytechnic who, as my manager, has been an enthusiastic supporter of my attempts to obtain a doctorate. I wish also to thank my psychologist colleagues at the Polytechnic Glenn, Kevin, Darren and Ian for acting as guinea pigs in the trialing of my survey instrument, and Glenn in acting as rater in the category check used in my analyses of psychology theses.

Thanks must also go to those past and present senior academics who agreed to be interviewed my 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 142, line 18: for 1984/84 read 1984/85.

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: A*ustralsian* should read *Australasian*

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