

UNA REVISION COMPARATIVA DE LOS ORIGENES HISTORICOS DEL PSICOANALISIS Y DEL CONDUCTISMO

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RESUMEN

A lo largo del medio siglo posterior a la II Guerra Mundial la investigación en Historia de la Psicología ha sido llevada a cabo por historiadores y psicólogos cuyos intereses y aproximaciones metodológicas han variado mucho. Comprender la dinámica historiográfica que caracteriza esta evolución resulta esencial para ser capaz de contruir unas historias válidas de la Psicología que proporcionen significado y contexto a la actividad profesional actual.

Cualquier investigación acerca de los orígenes del pensar conductista y psicoanalista debe ser guiada por dos preguntas. En primer lugar, ¿qué tipo de científicos han trabajado estos temas?; ¿qué acontecimientos personales, políticos y profesionales contribuyeron a su *Weltanschauung*? y ¿de qué manera afectó esto a su producción científica? En segundo lugar, nos preguntamos cuales son los motivos en la investigación de esta historia, ¿la reconstrucción del pasado en función de nuestras necesidades? Consecuentemente, ¿cómo construimos el significado en nuestras historias?

Naturalmente que estas investigaciones tocan aspectos epistemológicos así como sociológicos. Como historiador me interesa la dinámica de la comprensión y la organización social, sin embargo estos temas son considerados, con el paso del tiempo, como parte de la preocupación del historiador. Intentamos saber como determinadas figuras históricas, ideas y movimientos fueron capaces de influir en otras corrientes e individuos, y como estos eventos del pasado llegan hasta nosotros – como significan algo para nosotros después de tanto tiempo de haber sucedido.

Este trabajo estudio esta dinámica a través de la selección de una serie de escritos, a modo de ejemplo, acerca de la temprana historia del Psicoanálisis y del Conductismo. El objetivo de esta tarea es mostrar de forma ilustrativa como varios textos relacionados con una sola narrativa dan luz y a la vez enturbian nuestra comprensión de los eventos que resultan esenciales en la Psicología moderna.

ABSTRACT

In the half-century since the Second World War the domain of scholarly research into the history of psychology has been created and defined by historians and psychologists whose interests have been as varied as their methodological approaches. Comprehension of the historiographic dynamics which characterize this evolution is essential in order to be able to construct valid histories of psychology which provide meaning and context to contemporary endeavors.

Two questions must consequently assume a prominent place in any investigation of the origins of behaviorist and psychoanalytic thinking. First, what sorts of social scientists have addressed these issues; what personal, political, and professional agendas dominated their *weltanschauung* and in what ways did these effect their production? Second, what are our motives in researching this history, of reconstructing the past to our needs? Concomitantly, how do we construct meaning in our histories?

Naturally such investigations touch epistemological as well as sociological issues. As an historian my concern is with the dynamics of comprehension and social organization, however, these issues are considered part and parcel of the historical concern with change over time. We seek to know why historical figures, ideas, movements are able to exert influence over systems and individuals, and how these events travel to us from the past - how they mean something to us so long after the fact.

This essay explores these dynamics by example of a select number of writings on the early history of psychoanalysis and behaviorism. The goal of this endeavor is to comparatively illustrate how various and competing texts of a single narrative both enlighten and obscure our understanding of events which are crucial for modern and contemporary psychology.

In many ways historical and psychological views of the past are entirely compatible. Both disciplines inhabit a borderline intellectual area: psychology between the natural and social sciences, and history between the social sciences and humanities. Both seek to build narratives which logically clarify the evidence, exclude no relevant perspective or data, and satisfy the basic criterion of good story-telling: something valuable is taught and learned. There is more common ground than this however, historians have argued since the 1950s that virtually all histories from *Annales* to *alltagslebengeschichtlich* to biographical approaches make use of implied or unconscious psychological understandings of person and context. Psychological researchers into the history of the discipline have varied levels of interest in temporal and narrative concerns, though largely recognize their importance.

There are, however, some important differences in approach and style which result in variations in historical interpretation and presentation. The first of these is that while both disciplines are social scientific, psychology has long emulated the verifiability, reproducibility, and exactitude of the natural sciences. Historians

have long abandoned the notion that they reproduce the past “*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*” (Ranke). As consolation for accepting the relativized nature of their work, historians generally take pride in the effect their work has on others of their profession and the public at large.¹ Thus, to state it starkly, historians have abandoned the fantasy that they contribute to an exact science which will - at some distant point in the future - have full and comprehensive understanding of the past in favor of an approach which emphasizes the relevancy of the narrative for the present and immediate future.

As a consequence of this situation psychologists and historians place differing weight on the questions they ask of the past. Both will want to know the main participants (who), the time period and location (when & where), and will demand an explanation as to how the events unfolded (why). Yet, as we shall see, the historian's emphasis is invariably on contextual issues which answer temporal concerns first (i.e., when, or “*why now*”), while psychologists tend more often to be concerned with the transmission of ideas (who and why) and their contemporary form.

The historiography of Freud and the psychoanalytic movement is as contentious as it is enormous. Works by historians, psychologists, psychoanalysts and many others form and mark the landscape. This is due, partly, to the nature of the Freudian endeavor. By separating from academic psychiatry and psychology the growth and development of psychoanalysis was liberated from contemporary institutional pressures and constrained by its lack of acceptance by most psychiatrists and psychologists. The result was an insulation which fostered creative thinking foreign to current psychology, but which also prevented seeing analytic thought as a component of a larger endeavor. Additionally, by writing its own history (c.f., Freud (1914), Jones (1953-57)) psychoanalysts made clear their understanding of the power of history (and history writing) and their claim to authority based on access to information and precedence.

Two works which bring to light some of these differences in approach and method are Henri Ellenberger's lengthy chapter on Freud in his 1970 *The Discovery of the Unconscious* and Peter Gay's massive 1988 biography.² Ellenberger, a psychologist, criminologist and self-trained historian, provides a wonderfully rich tapestry of information on Freud, his family, and Vienna, placing Freud mid-way between Pierre Janet and Ludwig Binswanger. He writes of Freud and the early development of psychoanalysis as the continuation of an intellectual and philosophical trend. The purpose of his narrative is to provide continuity between historical figures in order to establish *dynamic psychiatry* as a meaningful term. Where he successfully contextualizes his figure and seeks to provide texture and

¹E.g., Peter Novick, *That noble dream: the «objectivity question» and the American historical profession* (1988) and Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's willing executioners: ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996).

² Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 418-570. Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: Norton, 1988).

color he also decidedly ignores questions of why and how Freud came to his ideas *just then*. This is an important point, for unlike observers such as Bruno Bettelheim³ who see the rise of psychoanalytic thinking as the product of the Viennese preoccupation with sex and death, Ellenberger's contextualization is composed of other psychologists and actors in related fields. Thus while Ellenberger's narrative is eminently worth reading and contains a great deal of interesting information, in seeking continuity across disciplinary time he fails to give weight to other (cultural) concerns which creates a teleological narrative more useful in 1998 as a historical document than a history textbook.

Ellenberger's Freud differs from accounts written by historians and those psychologists who equally value the quotidian, contemporary setting, and the history of ideas. Peter Gay's profound comprehension of the dynamics at work in nineteenth-century imaginations provides a narrative of Freud's life and work which sees his interaction with psychiatry and his creation of psychoanalysis as reactions to events close at home as well as the product of intellectual trends. The result is a portrait which ignores considerations Ellenberger thought important, even vital, in favor of cultural and intellectual activities not directly related to the disciple under study. Thus where Ellenberger sees continuity in the form of methodology and object of inquiry, Gay searches for the same in Austrian and Viennese institutional structures, the formation and dynamics of intellectual communities, and the cultural life of Freud's world. The result is a biographical narrative which, while guilty of a certain idolotry, answers why and how Freud developed psychoanalysis on personal, political, and professional grounds.

The historiography of behaviorist thinking is less contentious than that of Freudian psychoanalysis. Two historians of this branch of psychology have contributed a great deal to the task of constructing a worthwhile methodology and narrative by recasting the *Problemstellung*. John O'Donnell's *The Origins of Behaviorism*⁴ has proven valuable as a detailed examination of the origins and rise of the movement in the half century before 1920. Among his many interesting points is his distinction between *Watsonianism* and *behaviorist* thinking. By problematizing Watson's work in this manner, O'Donnell calls into question the standard narrative. If such a differentiation is accepted it forces us to examine carefully the antecedents of Watson's work and to conclude, as some have, that pre-conditions are merely the fertile soil in which a creative mind is able to grow. This contrasts sharply with whiggish psychological histories in which the very weight of the narrative is dependent upon the transfer of ideas from one individual and generation to the next.

The historian John Burnham contributed an interesting article in this regard as well. In his piece, "*On the Origins of Behaviorism*,"⁵ Burnham made an early

³ Bruno Bettelheim, "Freud's Vienna" In *Freud's Vienna* (New York: Vintage, 1956).

⁴ John O'Donnell, *The Origins of Behaviorism* (New York: NYU Press, 1985).

⁵ John C. Burnham, On the origins of Behaviorism. *Journal of History of the behavioral Science*, 4, (1968), 143-151

attempt to use Kuhn's sociologic model of scientific revolutions to clarify the origins of behaviorist thinking. The result was an article that stimulated many in this field to examine Watson and his work again and more critically. His narrative depends heavily on establishing the presence of behaviorist thinking - even the use of the term - before Watson's famous article "*Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It*."⁶ While his emphasis on the continuity of the phrase and concept appear similar to more traditional presentations of this history, it is clear that his agenda was indeed much larger (and indeed based on determining when behaviorist thinking arose) and included the reexamination of the basic tools with which historians work.

My choice of psychoanalytic and behaviorist schools of psychology for comparative analysis demands justification. Is there no danger in comparing two theories so diverse in origin, style, and methodology? Certainly, yet the similarities and common ground are indeed striking. Freud tended to be generally dismissive of psychologies, viewing them usually as competition. Psychoanalytic theory provided for observation of many sorts of behavior including body language and, on account of the long duration of analyses, repeated trials of specific behavior.⁷ These are naturally not the same as behaviorist experiments, but it is interesting to note that this was not a one-way exchange. Watson's reception of psychoanalysis was (at times) reasonably friendly and in fact it has been argued that Watson's description of Little Albert's fear reaction in his 1920 paper "*Conditioned Emotional Reactions*" as "*a transfer*" is a term derived directly from Freud's concept of transference.⁸ This interest was not confined to the pioneer generation as scholarly output on the convergence of these theories continues to grow.⁹ Historical perspectives on these issues remains essential, for while these approaches may differ in method they seek equally to understand who and what we are, one through introspection the other through statistical measurement. The parallels in theory and the social processes by which methodological techniques were standardized sheds light on the meaning of psychology and on the very nature of science itself.

Yet the choice of these fields has been made to accentuate the differences in approach and method. The historical origins of these differences reach back

⁶ John B. Watson, *Psychology as the Behaviorist Views it* *Psychological Review*, 20, (1913), 158-177.

⁷ A certain hostility is manifest, however, in psychoanalytic historiography. In Franz Alexander & Sheldon Selesnick's (1966) *A history of psychiatry: an evaluation of psychiatric thought and practice from prehistoric times to the present* New York : Harper. Watson and behaviorism receive barely a mention.

⁸ Mark RillingCradling John Watson's behaviorism and Little Albert in the context of psychoanalysis and psychopathology. *Presentation at the 29th annual meeting of the Cheiron Society*, Richmond, VA. 19-22 June 1997.

⁹ See, for example, Paige Crosby Quimette & Daniel N. Klein "Convergence of psychanalytic and cognitive-behavioral theories of the depression" (1993) In *Psychoanalytic perspectives on psychopathology* Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, pp. 191-223.

to the eighteenth century when organic and mentalist conceptions of the mind were hotly debated. Behaviorist thinking decidedly rejected Romantic notions of self and its relation to society. This is certainly not the case with Freud.¹⁰ The comparative analysis of the historical origins of these two influential branches of psychology provides as well a field upon which their methodological standardization can be clarified and contextualized. The case for comparative analysis was recently argued forcefully by Kurt Danziger who believes that "*The historiography of psychology has gained immeasurably by recent tendencies to investigate the specific social and institutional contexts with which psychologists had to operate.*" He further argues that if one aims at an analytical, rather than an essentially narrative, account of these historical relationships, a comparative perspective must eventually be adopted. ...there may be fundamental aspects of historical situations that are seen to be problematic only when one examines them in the light of comparable situations elsewhere.¹¹

Progress in psychology and history depends on the rigorous establishment and application of standardized technique and method. Yet as Ted Porter has pointed out methods, too, have an element of conventionality.¹² New research into the history and historiography of psychoanalysis and behaviorism continue to bring to light new data and challenging perspectives to our understanding of these important movements. My narrative analysis seeks to restructure the historiographic landscape by illuminating the differing approaches of historians and psychologists, and making clear the opportunity costs of each perspective. As applicable to psychoanalytic as well as behaviorist history, John Burhnam's thirty-year-old observation that our "understanding of the significance of behaviorism in the history of psychology - and the behavioral sciences - will be incomplete until the origins of the movement are viewed in a fresh way" remains valid.

¹⁰ One recent example is Suzanne Kirschner's (1996) *The religious and romantic origins of psychoanalysis*. Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge U. Press?

¹¹ Kurt Danziger (1987), Social context and investigative practice in early twentieth-century psychology. *Psychology in twentieth-century thought and society* Cambridge : Cambridge U. Press, p.13

¹² Theodore Porter (1995), *Trust in numbers: the pursuit of objectivity in science and public life* Princeton, NJ : Princeton U. Press, p.212